

Micro-Patterns of Violence: Disaggregating Provisional Irish Republican Army Activity, 1969-1979

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Abstract I

This thesis examines the first ten years of the campaign of political violence that was waged by the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) during the Northern Ireland Troubles (c.1969–1998). The primary aim is to understand how and why the PIRA chose to apply violence, and the consequences of these decisions. What is significant about this thesis, is the volume and range of PIRA violence that has been disaggregated and assessed – fatal and non-fatal acts of violence; targeted assassinations that were planned and executed as intended; operations that were stillborn, off-target, or thwarted by the security forces; attacks that maimed or killed unintended targets; and acts that were never intended to and did not cause physical harm to others. The work uncovers a richer account of the relationship between PIRA agency, chance, and the character and consequences of PIRA violence than has hitherto been possible.

The research has involved a detailed investigation of the PIRA's activity to establish how, when where and why the violence took different forms. The PIRA's operations have been examined in minute detail to identify and evaluate the significance of various characteristics that are apparent in each stage of the process: its design, execution, outcome, and reception. This has involved first, identifying why the PIRA selected certain targets and tactics, and the extent to which they perpetrated violence with accuracy and discrimination in each scenario. Second, the different outcomes that are produced – directly or indirectly – as a result of PIRA violence (including the material damage, deaths and injuries caused) and the relationship between these outcomes and the actions taken by the

perpetrator(s), have been explored. Finally, the thesis considers how and why the armed struggle was perceived in disparate ways by others.

Abstract II

This thesis examines the first ten years of the campaign of political violence that was waged by the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) during the Northern Ireland Troubles (c.1969–1998): three decades of fighting in and over Northern Ireland that began during the late 1960s when divergence over matters of identity, governance and self-determination led to sustained violent and non-violent confrontation in the region.¹ A significant amount of attention has been dedicated to explaining the onset, escalation, and settlement of the conflict, but not the military conduct of its participants.² The primary aim of this thesis, by contrast, is to understand how and why the PIRA chose to apply violence, and the consequences of these decisions.

¹ This analytical timeframe was selected to allow concentration on PIRA's formative years and the period of conflict with the greatest volume of fatal violent assaults.

² This literature for example, considers the ethics or morality of the PIRA's decision to apply violence, the extent to which the PIRA campaign achieved its objectives, and assesses the origins of and mechanisms involved in the ending of conflict. Examples include: Siniša Malešević and Niall Ó Dochartaigh, 'Why combatants fight: the Irish Republican Army and the Bosnian Serb Army compared', *Theory and Society*, 47/3 (2007), pp.293-326; John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary, *Explaining Northern Ireland: Broken Images* (Oxford, 1995). John Bew, Martyn Frampton and Iñigo Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists: Making Peace in Northern Ireland and the Basque Country* (Chichester, 2009); Niall Ó Dochartaigh, *Deniable Contact: Back-Channel Negotiation in Northern Ireland* (Oxford, 2021); Eamonn Mallie and David McKittrick, *The Fight for Peace: The Secret Story behind the Irish Peace Process* (London, 1996); Eamonn Mallie and David McKittrick, *Endgame in Ireland* (London, 2001); Eamon O'Kane, *The Northern Ireland Peace Process: From Armed Conflict to Brexit* (Manchester, 2021).

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A major element of this work has involved identifying and assessing the significance of political or material factors – endogenous and exogenous to the organisation – that influenced the character of PIRA violence. By doing so at scale, the author is able to contribute new insights into the ways in which the armed struggle was shaped, exacerbated, or restrained, and to demonstrate the sheer variety that characterized it.

The critical factors under examination throughout the thesis include: the degree of internal cohesion that existed over PIRA policy and practice; the characteristics of available members and weaponry; the characteristics of each target and operational environment; the nature and impact of counterinsurgency policy and practice; and the extent of popular support for, or opposition to, PIRA's campaign or agenda. The sheer breadth of this

investigation has teased out the complex and hitherto underexplored relationship between the PIRA's ambitions to coerce their opponents to yield to their demands, their military inferiority, rivalry with other political and paramilitary groups, and reliance on local support to sustain their campaign.

The scholarly literature on the Northern Ireland Troubles is well-established and growing.³ The PIRA are among the most studied organisations within this body of work.⁴ Some of the leading studies in the field of violence studies have been written – in full or in part – about what was a very long and dynamic insurgent campaign.⁵ The PIRA have been the primary focus, or object of a comparison with other case studies in various articles, chapters, edited collections, or monographs about the Troubles.⁶ Consequently, this thesis builds on an extensive body of knowledge.

³ See for instance: Brendan O'Leary, *A Treatise on Northern Ireland, Volume I: Colonialism* (Oxford, 2019). Brendan O'Leary, *A Treatise on Northern Ireland, Volume II: Control* (Oxford, 2019); Brendan O'Leary, *A Treatise on Northern Ireland, Volume III: Consociation and Confederation* (Oxford, 2019); Richard English, *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA* (London, 2003); Henry Patterson, *Ireland Since 1939: The Persistence of Conflict* (London, 2007); Marc Mulholland, *Northern Ireland: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2002); Niall Ó Dochartaigh, *From Civil Rights to Armalites: Derry and the Birth of the Irish Troubles*, 2nd edn (Basingstoke, 2007); M.L.R. Smith, *Fighting for Ireland?*, (London, 1995); Simon Prince and Geoffrey Warner, *Belfast, and Derry in Revolt: A New History of the Start of the Troubles*, (Dublin, 2011).

⁴ John Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland* (Oxford, 1991) p. viii; Robert W. White, 'The Irish Republican Army: An Assessment of Sectarianism', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 9/1 (1997), pp. 20-21; Brendan O'Leary, *A Treatise on Northern Ireland, Volume III: Consociation and Confederation*, (Oxford, 2019), p. 26.

⁵ English, *Armed Struggle*; Richard English, *Does Terrorism Work?: A History* (Oxford, 2016).

⁶ See for instance: Rogelio Alonso, *The IRA and Armed Struggle* (London, 2000); Siniša Malešević and Niall Ó Dochartaigh, 'Why combatants fight: the Irish Republican Army and the Bosnian Serb Army compared', *Theory and Society*, 47/3, (2007), pp.293-326; Henry Patterson, *Ireland since 1939: The Persistence of Conflict* (London, 2007); Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland*; Peter Krause, *Rebel Power: Why National Movements Compete, Fight, and Win*, (Ithaca, 2017); Richard English, *Terrorism: how to respond*, (Oxford, 2009).

It is common for single or comparative studies of non-state violence to scrutinise the relationship between political or material factors and the function of political violence.⁷

These studies often conclude that there is a causal relationship between one or more of these factors – for instance, rivalry, popular support, environment, or resources – and the way in which non-state actors decide to apply violence, the focus and intensity of the conflict that is waged, and/or its geographical and chronological variations.

To some extent, the research findings presented in this thesis corroborate the arguments made by scholars in work that predates it. For example, the material and political conditions are found, to varying degrees, to have influenced the way in which the PIRA planned and executed violence by providing incentives for certain forms of action or inaction. However, this thesis also critically departs from existing accounts on some aspects of the status quo and in doing so, offers an entirely new perspective on the phenomenon.

This thesis argues that both material and political factors are essential to understanding the form of PIRA violence because they posed physical obstacles or reputational threats that could and did incentivise the PIRA to select certain targets or tactics over others.

Accordingly, the PIRA selected their targets and tactics in accordance with how significant an obstacle, pressure or threat they perceived – or misperceived – political or material factors to pose their organisational survival or operational success, whether and what

⁷ Examples include Krause, *Rebel Power*; John Horgan and Max Taylor, 'Playing the "Green Card" -Financing the Provisional IRA: Part 1.' *Terrorism And Political Violence*, 11/2, (1999), pp.1-38; John Horgan and Max Taylor, 'Playing the "Green Card" - Financing the Provisional IRA: Part 2.' *Terrorism And Political Violence*, 15/2, (1999), pp.1-60; M. L. R. Smith and Isabel Woodford, 'The Political Economy of the Provos: Inside the Finances of the Provisional IRA—A Revision', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 41/3, (2017), pp.213-240; Martyn Frampton, 'The Moral Parameters of Violence: The Case of the Provisional IRA', *Journal of British Studies*, (2021), doi:10.1017/jbr.2021.122; Jacob N. Shapiro, *The Terrorist's Dilemma: Managing Violent Covert Organisations* (Princeton, 2013); Roseanna Doughty, 'Seamus O'Fawkes and Other Characters: The British tabloid cartoon coverage of the IRA campaign in England', *Media History*, 24/3-4, pp.440–457

alternative solutions were available to avoid or circumnavigate this, and how the organisation weighed the possible losses or gains that might result from either action or inaction in this regard.

Each operation was to some extent unique. However, the evidence suggests that most were designed with three primary objectives in mind: hitting the target, discriminating between targets and non-targets, and surviving and escaping from the scene of the crime. There was political incentive for them to avoid causing collateral damage, there was also political incentive to take calculated risks (for example, to compete with their opponents or rivals), and material obstacles to overcome in order to do so. For this reason, it is argued that the PIRA had three (not two) competing concerns to weigh when they selected their targets and tactics: lethality, survivability, and discrimination.

Extensive case study material is presented in part III to make this case. The case studies demonstrate that the likelihood of the PIRA attaining each of these objectives on any given occasion varied from case to case. This is the intensity of risk of failure on any count, that was incorporated into the design of each operation varied in accordance with the type of weapons and tactics that were involved.

On some occasions the PIRA posed a significant danger to the police or military personnel they targeted because the weapons and tactics employed were sophisticated and powerful. There were also times, however, when PIRA weapons were so unstable that they posed a

greater risk to themselves than those they intended to target. In terms of discrimination, it is also apparent that there are some PIRA operations which appear to have had little to no prospect of inflicting casualties on non-combatants because they took place in remote locations and involved weapons and tactics over which the PIRA had a high degree of control. But there were occasions when the PIRA perpetrated their attacks in densely populated spaces and used weapons or tactics which did not provide any mechanism for discriminating between targets and non-combatants.

Of course, the design and the outcome of PIRA operations were not one and the same – the discrepancy which existed between what the PIRA had intended to occur, and the actual results of their operations could be vast. For this reason, it is useful to disaggregate the lifecycle of PIRA operations in their respective parts and examine the perpetrator's role in shaping each, respectively.

The outcome of PIRA operations (stillborn, thwarted, on- and off-target, with and without collateral damage) was not necessarily commensurate with the degree of risk that was incorporated into the design; only the extent to which that risk materialised. When we examine PIRA operations in detail we see that there are a few different ways it did so. Sometimes the PIRA's plans proved unfeasible because they had made some fatal error in their calculations. Other times the PIRA made tactical errors in the execution of attacks. And then there were times when forces outside the PIRA's control, such as the actions and reactions of others, fundamentally altered the trajectory of events. The actual outcome of any given PIRA operation could be determined by both PIRA agency and subject to chance.

It is pertinent to ask whether the risks which incorporated into the design of the PIRA's operations were foreseeable. It would be fair to say that there were times when the PIRA used weapons and tactics that they failed to anticipate could prove dangerously ineffective, or when they operated in spaces that they mistakenly believed would not be occupied by civilians ever, or at least at the time they conducted their attack. Other times, the PIRA used weapons and tactics which they knew had failed on previous occasions or allowed the outcome of their operations to rely upon the actions or reactions of the security forces or civilians in order to produce a discriminate outcome. As such, it is argued that the character of the armed struggle depended on the PIRA's ability and willingness to plan and execute violence in a manner that was likely to produce accurate and discriminate results. An original framework of analysis, the *Ability and Willingness Nexus*, is introduced in the second part of the thesis as a tool to facilitate a more nuanced discussion of the agency of the perpetrator in designing and executing incidents of political violence.

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Introduction

This thesis examines the first ten years of the campaign of political violence waged by the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) during the Northern Ireland Troubles (c.1969–1979): three decades of fighting in and over Northern Ireland that began during the late 1960s when divergence over matters of identity, governance and self-determination led to sustained violent and non-violent confrontation in the region.⁸

A significant amount of attention has been dedicated to explaining the onset, escalation, and settlement of the conflict, but not the military conduct of its participants.⁹ The primary aim of this thesis, by contrast, is to understand how and why the PIRA chose to apply violence, and the consequences of these decisions. The research has involved a detailed investigation of the PIRA's activity to establish how, when where and why the violence took different forms. The PIRA's operations have been examined in minute detail to identify and evaluate the significance of various characteristics that are apparent in each stage of the process: its design, execution, outcome, and reception. This has involved first,

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identifying why the PIRA selected certain targets and tactics, and the extent to which they perpetrated violence with accuracy and discrimination in each scenario. Second, the different outcomes that are produced – directly or indirectly – as a result of PIRA violence (including the material damage, deaths and injuries caused) and the relationship between these outcomes and the actions taken by the perpetrator(s), have been explored. Finally, the thesis considers how and why the armed struggle was perceived in disparate ways by others.

A major element of this work has involved identifying and assessing the significance of political or material factors – endogenous and exogenous to the organisation – that influenced the character of PIRA violence. By doing so at scale, the author is able to contribute new insights into the ways in which the armed struggle was shaped, exacerbated, or restrained, and to demonstrate the sheer variety that characterized it.

The critical factors under examination throughout the thesis include: the degree of internal cohesion that existed over PIRA policy and practice; the characteristics of available members and weaponry; the characteristics of each target and operational environment; the nature and impact of counterinsurgency policy and practice; and the extent of popular support for, or opposition to, PIRA's campaign or agenda. The sheer breadth of this investigation has teased out the complex and hitherto underexplored relationship between the PIRA's ambitions to coerce their opponents to yield to their demands, their military inferiority, rivalry with other political and paramilitary groups, and reliance on local support to sustain their campaign.

Historical Background

The Troubles been aptly described by Richard English as resembling a ‘triangular war of attrition’.¹⁰ Indeed, the violence involved and was fought between the two (internally divided) communities inhabiting the region, as well as the UK state security forces responsible for upholding law and order. Each side was represented by organisations that, at least in the case of the paramilitaries, were fissiparous and sometimes plagued by internecine rivalry.

Republican paramilitaries – guerrillas or militias intent on breaking the connection between Ireland and Britain by force – were almost entirely drawn from the Catholic nationalist community. The major republican paramilitary organisations that participated in the conflict were those that were forged in the aftermath of splits in the Irish Republican Army that occurred over matters of ideology, policy, or practice.¹¹ In December 1969 the IRA split into what would become known as the Official IRA (OIRA) and Provisional IRA (PIRA) respectively. Initially the OIRA was the larger and dominant group but was eventually overtaken by the PIRA, before declaring a cessation of offensive actions from May 1972

¹⁰ Richard English, ‘Explaining the Northern Ireland Troubles’, in Northern Ireland Community Relations Committee Council, *What Made Now: Northern Ireland*, (Belfast, 2008); Richard English, *Armed Struggle*, subtitle (London, 2003).

¹¹ The IRA was first formed in 1919 to wage the campaign of guerrilla violence known as the Irish War of Independence (1919-1921); and was itself descended from previous republican paramilitary groups including the Irish Volunteers that formed in 1913 and some of whom fought at the Easter Rising (1916). The IRA split in 1922 over the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty: those who supported the treaty formed the core of what would become the Irish National Army, while those who opposed the treaty (the majority share of the ‘old IRA’) continued to fight for Irish Independence. The Irish Civil War (1922-1923) was fought between the (anti-treaty) IRA and Irish National Army and won by the latter. The (anti-treaty) IRA went on to wage three further campaigns of guerrilla violence that were ultimately, unsuccessful: the British Campaign of 1939, the Northern Campaign of 1942–1944 and the Border Campaign of 1956–1962. See, for instance: Tim Pat Coogan, *The IRA*, 5th edn (New York, 2000).

(interrupted by a small and decreasing volume of violent episodes up until the 1990s). OIRA members that opposed the ceasefire, however, split from the organisation and went on to form the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) in 1974. The paramilitary campaigns of the PIRA and INLA lasted through to 1998; the former being the largest in scale and scope, that is in terms of volume of activity, material damage and cost to human life.

Loyalist paramilitaries – guerrillas or militias committed to maintaining the union by force – were exclusively (it is generally assumed) drawn from the Protestant unionist population. The main loyalist paramilitary groups active during the conflict included the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) that formed in the mid-1960s and remained active until they declared a ceasefire in 1994, and the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) that formed in September 1971, was active until 1994, and sometimes claimed responsibility for their activities under a different name: the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF). Other (smaller) loyalist paramilitary groups active during the conflict include the Red Hand Commando (RHC) from 1970.

The various elements that collectively made up the security-force response to the violence erupting in Northern Ireland – and will hereafter be referred to collectively as the security forces – included the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), and various elements of the British Military that were stationed in the country after 1969 when aid to the Civil Power (ACP) was invoked, including the Ulster Defence Regiment (or UDR, an infantry regiment of the British Army that was established in 1970 after the disbandment of the ‘B-Specials’ or Ulster Special Constabulary (USC)).

Tables of conflict-related data can vary slightly because different practices have been adopted to code the data or different information has been available to the author(s) when the data was coded. McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives* counted a total of 3635 fatalities between 1969 and 1998 which is the most comprehensive list of fatalities for it includes those who died in car collisions during the conflict, or who died because of a heart attack when witnessing violence.¹²

The volume of fatalities that occurred varied year upon year. 1972 saw the highest number of fatalities in any single year (496), and fatalities continued at a heightened level during the mid-1970s (264 in 1973, 304 in 1974, 267 in 1975, and 308 in 1976) and began to gradually decrease over time.¹³ Between 1969 and 1998 total conflict-related fatalities included: 2025 civilians (1229 Catholic, 395 Protestant), 1012 members of security-force personnel (503 British Army Soldiers, 201 RUC, 102 RUCR, 206 UDR/RIR) and 539 paramilitaries (393 republican, 146 loyalist).¹⁴

¹² 1969 – 1998 in 'Table 1 - Deaths by Year and Status', David McKittrick, Seamus Kelters, Brian Feeney, Chris Thornton, and David McVea, *Lost Lives: The Stories of the Men, Women and Children Who Died as a Result of the Northern Ireland Troubles* (Edinburgh, 2007), p.1552. The Malcom Sutton index counts 3489 fatalities for the same period: 1969 – 1998 in "Organisation" by "Year", in Malcom Sutton, *An Index of Deaths from the Conflict in Ireland*, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/cgi-bin/tab2.pl>, (30-07-2022).

¹³ Table 4 – Overall Deaths by Year' in McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, p.155.

¹⁴ Adapted from: 'Table 1 - Deaths by Year and Status', McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, p. 1552.

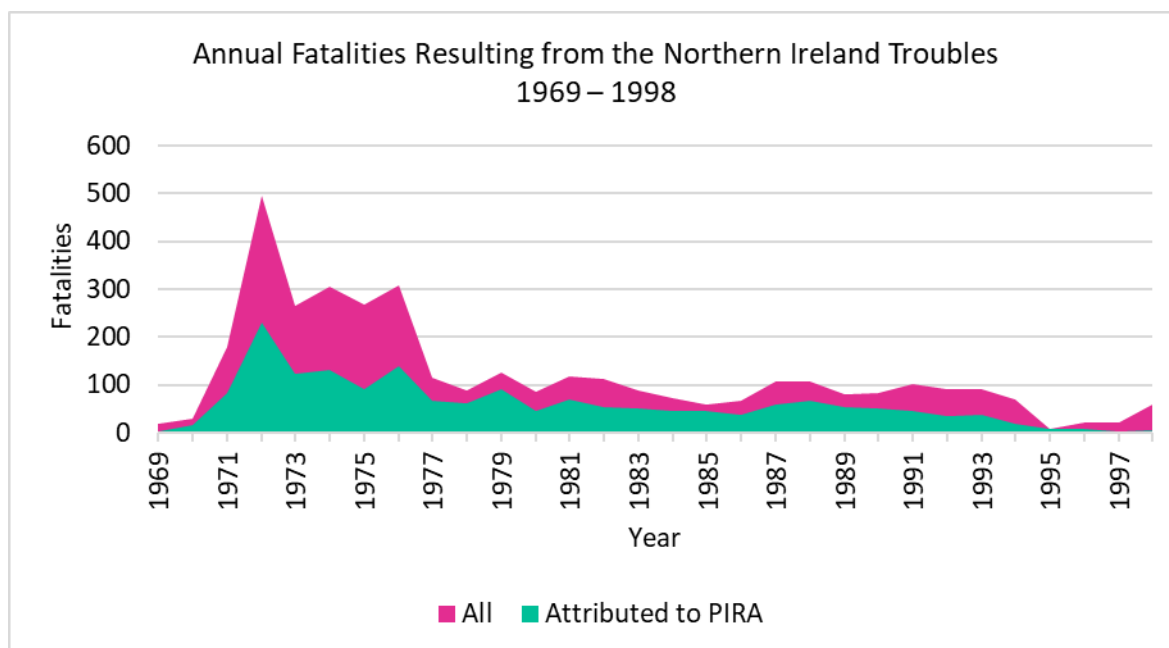


Figure 1.1 Annual Fatalities Resulting from the Northern Ireland Troubles 1969 – 1998.
Source: adapted from 'Table 4 – overall Deaths by Year' in McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, p.155.

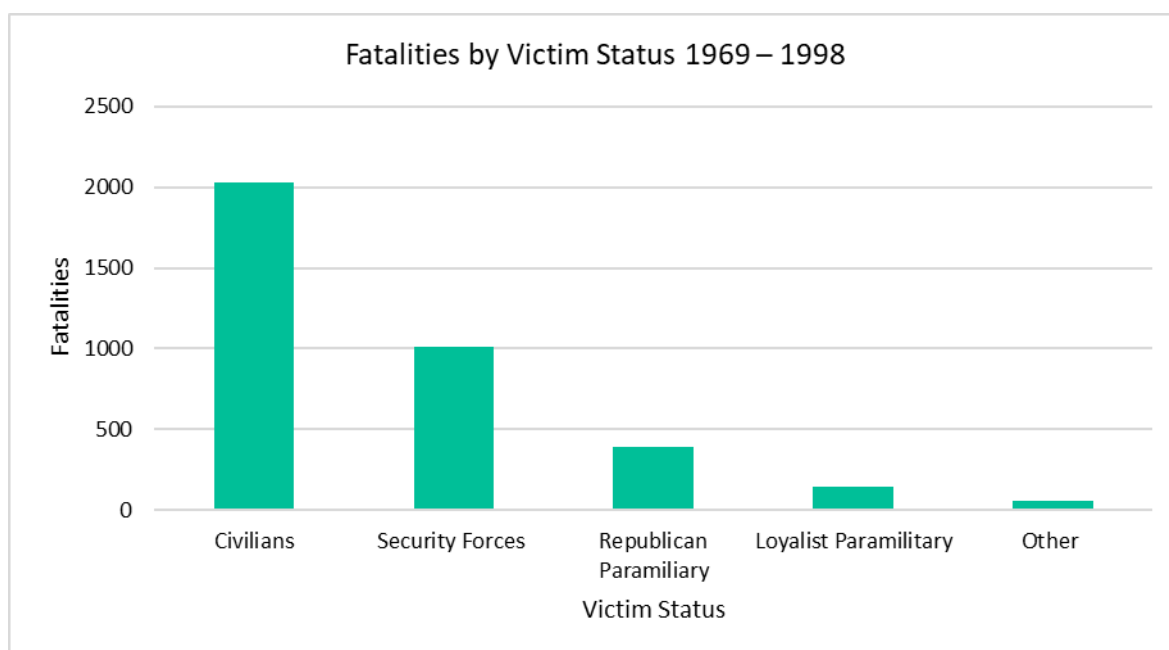


Figure 1.2 Fatalities by Victim Status 1969 – 1998.
Source: adapted from: 'Table 1 - Deaths by Year and Status', McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, p. 1552.

Republican paramilitaries are attributed responsibility for the largest share of the fatalities (59%), then Loyalist paramilitaries (29%), followed by the security forces (11%).

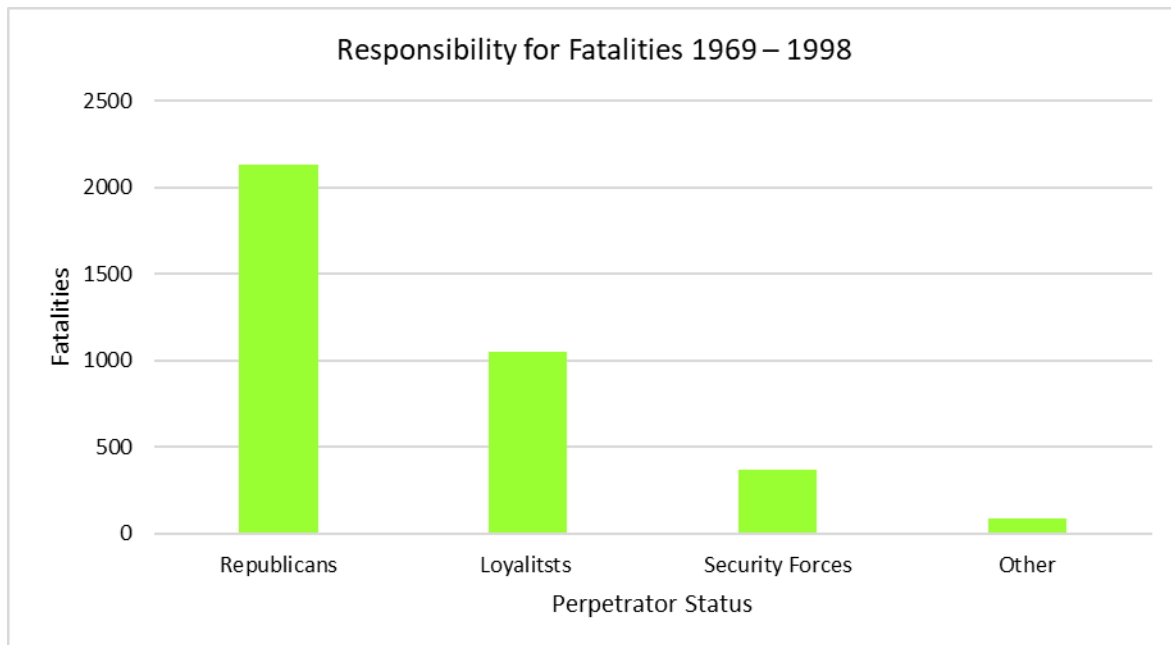


Figure 1.3 Responsibility for Fatalities 1969 – 1998.

Source: adapted from: 'Table 2 - Responsibility for Deaths' in McKittrick *et. al.*, *Lost Lives*, p.1553.

Republican paramilitary violence was predominantly directed towards security-force personnel, but also included the targeted assassination of individuals outside of the military or police, and a significant campaign of economic targeting. Republican paramilitaries were responsible for killing most of the soldiers and police personnel (982 between 1969 and 1998).¹⁵ To put this in context, only 28 further security-force casualties are attributed to other agents including Protestant paramilitaries.¹⁶ Further fatalities that republican

¹⁵ Table 1: Cross-tabulation of Perpetrators and Victims, Irish Conflict 1969-1998, in Robert W. White, *Out of the Ashes: An Oral History of The Provisional Irish Republican Movement* (Newbridge, 2017), p. 6.

¹⁶ Ibid. NB. White codes 1010 security force fatalities between 1969 and 1998, whereas the authors of *Lost Lives* count 1012.

paramilitaries are also attributed responsibility for in this period include the killing of 802 civilians (including non-combatants, prison officers and former members of the security forces), 36 loyalist paramilitaries, and 161 of their own members by accident, during prison protests (hunger strikes), or as a result of internecine feuds.

Loyalist paramilitaries were most often concerned with reprisal attacks upon the unarmed Catholic population, but also targeted the security forces and/or commercial properties and elements of infrastructure at times. The vast majority of fatalities attributed to Loyalist paramilitaries between 1969 and 1998 were civilians (872 of 979).¹⁷

The security forces were engaged in confrontations with republican paramilitaries more often than they engaged with loyalist paramilitaries and were responsible for a greater volume of republican paramilitary fatalities than loyalists by comparison: 141 and 20 respectively. Security-force personnel have also been attributed responsibility for 198 civilian casualties during this period.¹⁸

The PIRA and the Armed Struggle

On 28 December 1969, a few months after violence first broke out in Northern Ireland, a clandestine paramilitary organisation introducing themselves as the Provisional Irish Republican Army formally announced they had emerged as the latest group intent on

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

serving the Irish nationalist cause in the republican tradition of armed struggle.¹⁹ The political arm of the movement – the abstentionist political party, *Provisional Sinn Féin* – was founded by a similar split soon after.

The PIRA initially adopted much the same organisational structure as earlier iterations of the IRA, and intended that appointments were to be made democratically.²⁰ A 12-person Executive was to be selected by the PIRA rank-and-file at the General Army Convention (a meeting that was supposed to be held on an annual basis but was more regularly postponed in light of security concerns).²¹ The Executive would then appoint the Chief of Staff and the 7-person Army Council who were responsible for leading the armed struggle and consulting with the Executive about any matters of strategic significance. The Army Council held the following positions: Deputy Chief of Staff, Adjutant General, Director of Organization, Director of Intelligence, Director of Engineering, Quarter Master General, and Secretary. General Headquarters staff (GHQ staff) directed the PIRA's departments for Engineering, Finance, Security, Intelligence, Foreign and Domestic Operations, Publicity, Training, and Education (several of the GHQ staff positions were held by those who also sat on the Army Council). The PIRA volunteers were organised geographically into brigades, battalions and companies.²² The largest brigade was Belfast which is believed to have consisted of three or four battalions that were each subdivided into a number of companies. After Belfast, the next most active brigades were Derry, East Tyrone and South Armagh. The PIRA also relied

¹⁹ Seán Mac Stiofáin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* (Edinburgh, 1975), p.142.

²⁰ 'Provisional IRA Command Structure', B. O'Brien, *The Long War: The IRA & Sinn Féin* (Dublin, 1999) 3rd edition, p.110; 'IRA Structure', Ed Molony, *A Secret History of the IRA* (London, 2007), second edition, p.711.

²¹ Bishop and Mallie, *Provisional IRA*, pp.34-35.

²² *Ibid.*; Moloney, *Secret History*, p.87.

upon assistance from local defence committees, and part-time auxiliary recruits for logistical and other support.

To provide an overview of the armed struggle, the PIRA's campaign of political violence can be approximately – if imperfectly – divided into phases by the strategy that was (or was claimed) to be employed at the time. The newly formed PIRA Army Council agreed to proceed with a three-phase strategy from January 1970 (defence, then defence plus retaliation, followed by all-out offensive action). The PIRA was certainly small in numbers and resource-poor at the outset – but it would go on to become one of the major participants in the conflict. Within a matter of months, the organisation was able to recruit and train members and acquire the financial and military resources it needed to launch a sustained armed struggle. The PIRA maintained their campaign of offensive activity intermittently, and with a varying degree of intensity – through to 1977.

The PIRA's 'Long War' began in October 1977 which involved a shift away from the traditional emphasis on all-out military victory to a focus instead on gradually eroding Britain's will to remain in Northern Ireland through persistent violence. The long war was also characterised by organisational restructure and reform. Two coordinating committees were formed.²³ The Northern Command was responsible for offensive operations in the six counties that made up Northern Ireland plus the five counties that were close to the border (Louth, Cavan, Monaghan, Leitrim and Donegal).²⁴ The Southern Command were responsible for the remaining 21 counties and providing logistical support for wider PIRA

²³ 'Provisional IRA Command Structure', O'Brien, *The Long War*, p.110; 'IRA Structure', Molony, *Secret History*, p.711.

²⁴ Ibid.

activities. This change marked the shifting of power within the movement (from Dublin to the North) as a small nucleus of leaders in the North began to gain and consolidate control over PIRA strategy over time.²⁵

The PIRA also sought to tighten their defences against counterinsurgency by adopting a cell rather than brigade structure to minimise the likelihood and impact of infiltration. This essentially meant that the battalions and companies that each brigade was previously subdivided into would be replaced by active service units (ASUs): small groups of volunteers that took on a specialised role such as sniping, bombing, or internal security or intelligence work.²⁶ However, in practice, it is thought that outside of Belfast that much of the PIRA retained its original battalion and company structures.²⁷

Concurrently, PIRA prisoners waged a significant protest against the loss of special category status (or 'political status') and maltreatment of republican prisoners that bled into the organisation's violence and non-violent agenda on the outside. The complex, escalating, and powerfully self-sustaining 'prison war' (1976 – 1981) involved PIRA inmates refusing to wear prison uniforms and staging multiple (sometimes fatal) hunger strikes, while their colleagues on the outside assassinated members of the prison staff. The prison war received extensive media coverage and captured international attention. It also was pivotal in the rebalancing of the PIRA's focus in favour of political over military means. Indeed, much of the literature makes clear the international attention that was drawn to the 1981 hunger strikes was a

²⁵ Ibid.; Toolis, *Rebel Hearts*, p.318.

²⁶ O'Brien, *The Long War*, p.161; English, *Armed Struggle*, p.344; Toolis, *Rebel Hearts*, p.205; Taylor, *Provos*, p.211; Bradley and Feeney, *Insider*, pp.149-150; M.L.R. Smith, *Fighting for Ireland* (London, 1995), p.145.

²⁷ Thomas Leahy, , 'The Influence of Informers and Agents on Provisional Irish Republican Army Military Strategy and British Counter-Insurgency Strategy, 1976–94', *20th Century British History*, 26:1, (2015), pp.122-146.

critical factor in explaining the changing direction of the PIRA campaign in its final phase: 'the ArmaLite and the ballot box' (c.1981 to 1998).

Over a period of almost thirty years the PIRA waged a campaign of political violence. Throughout this time the PIRA's public rhetoric maintained some degree of consistency in their messaging regarding what they claimed to be their purpose and agenda. Yet, it would be fair to state that the PIRA's adherence to orthodox republican principles seemingly eroded over time.²⁸ Abstention was eventually abandoned, and the PIRA gradually redirected a greater proportion of their focus to their political strategy.²⁹

The PIRA's leadership also became increasingly involved in secret talks and political negotiations, and the armed struggle was interrupted by several periods of ceasefire or truces consequently. The PIRA maintained these with certain caveats – such as their claiming the right to 'retaliation' – and they were not always strictly enforced. The first ran from 26 June 1972 to 9 July 1972. The next commenced on 22 December 1974 until 2 January 1975 initially, before being extended to 16 January 1975. Soon after that the PIRA called an indefinite truce which commenced on 10 February 1975 and eventually lasted until 23 January 1976. Ceasefires were later maintained between 6-8 April 1994, 31 August 1994 to 9 February 1996, and from 20 July 1997 onwards.³⁰ Ultimately, the PIRA campaign did not galvanise the whole island of Ireland in support of republican goals or bring about an end to partition. Rather, the conflict formally concluded with the organisation's political arm, Provisional Sinn Féin [PSF] joining the British and Irish governments, and most of the

²⁸ Ó Dochartaigh, *Deniable Contact*, pp.45-48.

²⁹ O'Leary, *A Treatise: Volume I*, pp. 65-67.

³⁰ O'Brien, *The Long War*, p.21; Smith, *Fighting*, pp.103-105.

political parties in Northern Ireland in accepting the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.

However, many lives were lost before this time.

In total, PIRA violence claimed the lives of 1,768 individuals including: 921 members of the security forces in the UK and Ireland (454 British Military Services, 181 UDR, 273 RUC/RUCR, 6 GB Police and 7 Irish Guard/Garda Síochána), 659 civilians (including 20 Prison Officers), 30 loyalist paramilitaries and 151 of the PIRA's own members or other republican paramilitaries.³¹

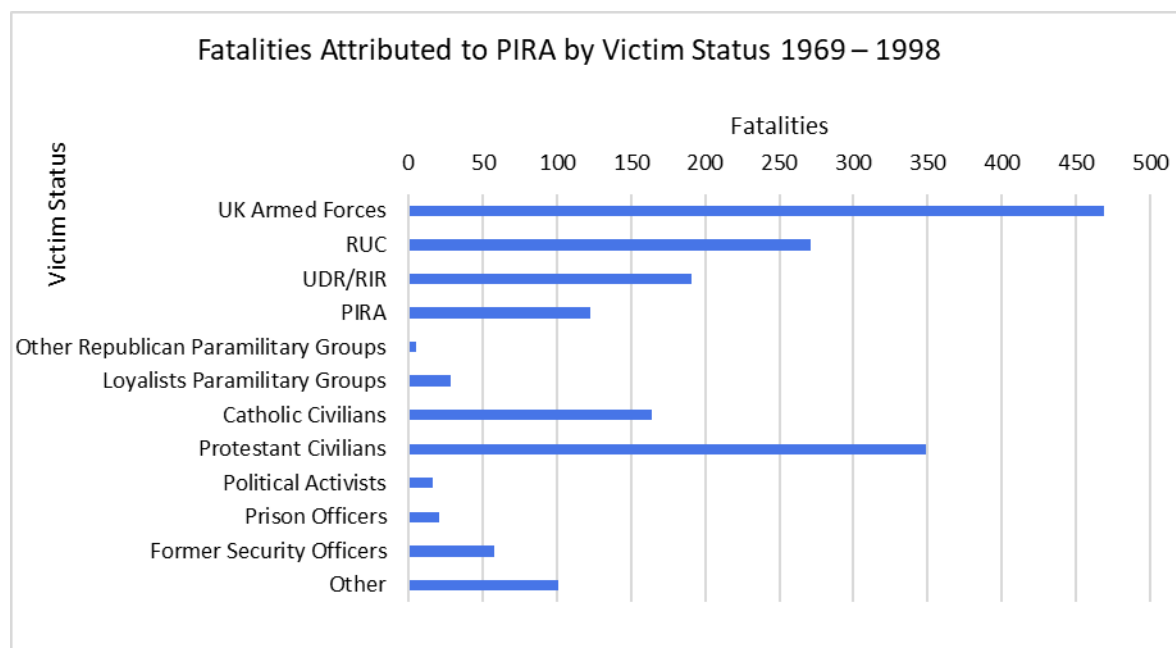


Figure 1.4 Fatalities Attributed to PIRA by Victim Status 1969 – 1998.

Sources: adapted from: Table 1: Cross-tabulation of Perpetrators and Victims, Irish Conflict 1969-1998, in Robert W. White, *Out of the Ashes: An Oral History of The Provisional Irish Republican Movement* (Newbridge, 2017), p. 6.

³¹ See: Table 20, 'Deaths for which the IRA were responsible', in McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, p.1562. The total 1768 also includes 7 cases the authors have recorded as 'other'.

Historiography

The scholarly literature on the Northern Ireland Troubles is well-established and growing.³²

The PIRA are among the most studied organisations within this body of work.³³ In fact, some of the leading analyses in the wider field of violence studies have been written – in full or in part – about what was a very long and dynamic insurgent campaign.³⁴ The PIRA have been the primary focus, or object of a comparison with other case studies in various articles, chapters, edited collections, or monographs about the Troubles.³⁵ Consequently, this thesis builds on an extensive body of knowledge.

It is common for single or comparative studies of non-state violence to scrutinise the relationship between political or material factors and the function of political violence.³⁶

These studies often conclude that there is a causal relationship between one or more of

³² See for instance: Brendan O’Leary, *A Treatise on Northern Ireland, Volume I: Colonialism* (Oxford, 2019). Brendan O’Leary, *A Treatise on Northern Ireland, Volume II: Control* (Oxford, 2019); Brendan O’Leary, *A Treatise on Northern Ireland, Volume III: Consociation and Confederation* (Oxford, 2019); English, *Armed Struggle*; Henry Patterson, *Ireland Since 1939: The Persistence of Conflict* (London, 2007); Marc Mulholland, *Northern Ireland: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2002); Niall Ó Dochartaigh, *From Civil Rights to Armalites: Derry and the Birth of the Irish Troubles*, 2nd edn (Basingstoke, 2007); M.L.R. Smith, *Fighting*; Simon Prince and Geoffrey Warner, *Belfast, and Derry in Revolt: A New History of the Start of the Troubles*, (Dublin, 2011).

³³ John Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland* (Oxford, 1991) p. viii; Robert W. White, ‘The Irish Republican Army: An Assessment of Sectarianism’, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 9/1 (1997), pp. 20-21; O’Leary, *A Treatise, Volume III*, p. 26.

³⁴ English, *Armed Struggle*; Richard English, *Does Terrorism Work?: A History* (Oxford, 2016).

³⁵ See for instance: Rogelio Alonso, *The IRA and Armed Struggle* (London, 2000); Malešević and Ó Dochartaigh, ‘Why combatants fight’, pp.293-326; Henry Patterson, *Ireland since 1939: The Persistence of Conflict* (London, 2007); Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland*; Peter Krause, *Rebel Power: Why National Movements Compete, Fight, and Win*, (Ithaca, 2017); Richard English, *Terrorism: how to respond*, (Oxford, 2009).

³⁶ Examples include Krause, *Rebel Power*; John Horgan and Max Taylor, ‘Playing the “Green Card” -Financing the Provisional IRA: Part 1.’ *Terrorism And Political Violence*, 11/2, (1999), pp.1-38; John Horgan and Max Taylor, ‘Playing the “Green Card” - Financing the Provisional IRA: Part 2.’ *Terrorism And Political Violence*, 15/2, (1999), pp.1-60; M. L. R. Smith and Isabel Woodford, ‘The Political Economy of the Provos: Inside the Finances of the Provisional IRA—A Revision’, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 41/3, (2017), pp.213-240; Martyn Frampton, ‘The Moral Parameters of Violence: The Case of the Provisional IRA’, *Journal of British Studies*, (2021), doi:10.1017/jbr.2021.122; Jacob N. Shapiro, *The Terrorist’s Dilemma: Managing Violent Covert Organisations* (Princeton, 2013); Roseanna Doughty, ‘Seamus O’Fawkes and Other Characters: The British tabloid cartoon coverage of the IRA campaign in England’, *Media History*, 24/3-4, pp.440–457.

these factors – for instance, rivalry, popular support, environment, or resources – and the way in which non-state actors decide to apply violence, the focus and intensity of the conflict that is waged, or its geographical and chronological variations.

To some extent, the research findings presented in this thesis corroborate the arguments made by scholars in work that predates it. For example, the material and political conditions are found, to varying degrees, to have influenced the way in which the PIRA planned and executed violence by providing incentives for certain forms of action or inaction. However, this thesis also critically departs from existing accounts on some aspects of the status quo and in doing so, offers an entirely new perspective on the phenomenon.

One of the key research findings presented in this thesis (part I) is that the PIRA's choice of targets and tactics was influenced by their concern over the way in which their decisions would be perceived. There is a wealth of evidence which demonstrates that the PIRA tailored armed struggle – proactively and reactively – with public opinion in mind. The case studies examined have revealed, for example, that the PIRA could be swayed from taking certain actions if they anticipated public reaction could be negative to the point that the choice would be detrimental to their campaign. The PIRA could also be inspired to choose a new strategic or tactical direction – reactively – when it became clear that forms of violence produced public outrage and had, therefore, backfired politically. Conversely, in exceptional circumstances, the PIRA were compelled to take action when they perceived that their failure to do so would erode local support or indicate to their opponent(s) that they were on the back foot, militarily. In this sense, the research supports arguments that have been

made regarding the relationship between political factors and the character of the PIRA campaign.

The research agrees, for example, with Peter Krause's argument that internecine rivalry could inspire the PIRA to degenerate into counterproductive violence.³⁷

Although the OIRA and PIRA were involved in a race to the top of the movement, their infighting and outbidding resembled a race to the bottom that expended scarce resources on increasingly extreme operations, muddled the movement message, and helped create new and dangerous enemies.³⁸

The PIRA's desire to eclipse the activities of the rival republican paramilitary group, the Official IRA (OIRA), for example, is found to have inspired the PIRA to ramp up their activities in the early 1970s beyond the point whereby they could effectively remain in control of their operations and civilian casualties were caused as a result.

The thesis also corroborates Martyn Frampton's argument that public opinion could influence the manner in which the PIRA decided to apply violence by generating moral parameters that restrained the scope of the PIRA's operations.

....the IRA recognized that the parameters for war were set not simply by reference to ideology but also by a reading of what might be acceptable to those identified as "the people" or "the community".³⁹

³⁷ Krause, *Rebel Power*, p.132

³⁸ Ibid., p.153

³⁹ Frampton, 'The Moral Parameters', p.1

This is evident, for example, by the fact that the percentage of PIRA activity that targeted civilians directly, involved torture, or was overtly sectarian in nature was extremely limited in the context of their total programme – especially when compared to other paramilitary groups party to this or other conflicts that have occurred in recent decades. Ron Dundai’s research on the PIRA’s internal policing and punishment processes, and Max Abrahms work concerning civilian targets in violent conflict, are drawn upon to provide further corroboration of this argument in part I.⁴⁰

This thesis suggests that the relationship between the political conditions and the armed struggle is, however, more acute, and complicated than the literature has established to date for three primary reasons. Firstly, the PIRA’s capacity to actually exert influence over public opinion was critically impaired by the fact that they did not have a widely accepted political mandate to apply violence. Paramilitary groups that wage war without a political mandate to do so are not considered liberation fighters by those they claim to represent. The form and function of the violence they perpetrate can be scrutinised in a different light as a result. This is quite simply because the ends are not broadly considered to justify the means.

Secondly, the PIRA’s ability to foster support for their campaign was impeded by the disproportionate volume of media attention that was dedicated to the most shocking or egregious acts of violence they perpetrated. The literature on cognitive psychology,

⁴⁰ Ron Dundai, *Penalty in the Underground: The IRA’s Pursuit of Informers* (Oxford, 2022); Max Abrahms, *Rules for Rebels: The Science of Victory in Militant History* (Oxford, 2018).

including works by Daniel Kahneman and Lieve Van Woensel, explains why this was the case.⁴¹ Their research on availability bias, for example, demonstrates that media attention can cause particular events or issues to become highly salient in the mind of the public and bias their perceptions. This can have a significant and lasting impact on public perceptions of the subject matter in question. The consequence of this for the PIRA specifically was that the behaviour they exhibited on rare occasions became conflated with perceptions of their wider activity. Likewise, nodal events became synonymous with the interpretations of the sum of the armed struggle.

Thirdly, the challenge of adapting the armed struggle to accommodate the political conditions was more complicated than a binary relationship between action and audience. This is because, despite what the PIRA may have claimed, there were multiple stakeholders to any contest – political, military or paramilitary – over Northern Ireland that collectively held diametrically opposed and seemingly unreconcilable positions. What is more, each of these stakeholders, including the PIRA, could be internally divided over matters of policy and practice. These political conditions were challenging, in and of themselves, and not only for the PIRA. Any party that sought to gain influence over the conflict had to navigate the divided character of its audiences; a task which was further complicated by the fact that they were not the only actor with agency to influence them. To the contrary, public perceptions of independent actions taken, or statements made by representatives of the

⁴¹ Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking Fast and Slow*, Kindle Edition (Penguin, 2011); Lieve Van Woensel, *A Bias Radar for Responsible Policy-Making: Foresight-Based Scientific Advice* (Cham, Switzerland, 2020).

government, military, church, or paramilitary groups, for example, were formed very much in relation to one another.

The relationship between material factors and the dynamics of the PIRA campaign is examined in part II. To some extent, the PIRA are found to have designed their operations in accordance with the number of volunteers they had recruited and trained, and the volume and type of weapons and ammunition they had amassed. These research findings broadly corroborate the argument that these material conditions can explain the undulating scale and effectiveness of PIRA operations over time. The data presented in part II, for example, agrees with A.R. Oppenheimer's claim that the PIRA was able to inflict a higher toll of casualties on the security forces as they purchased or manufactured weapons which provided them with a greater degree of firepower.⁴² They also corroborate, to some extent, the argument that the outcome of PIRA operations could depend on the quality of the weapons or tactics the PIRA employed.⁴³

The macro-level picture of the relationship between material factors and the dynamics of the PIRA campaign is, however, shown to be more complicated than a simple cause-and-effect correlation for several reasons. Firstly, PIRA weapons and tactics were effective only to the extent to which they matched, overcame, or overwhelmed the counterinsurgency (COIN) measures that were put in place to counter them. Secondly, the case material presented includes examples that appear to contradict the logic that the PIRA were at their

⁴² Oppenheimer, *The IRA*, pp.58-66.

⁴³ See for example, Bowyer Bell, *Targets and Tactics*, p.87.

most deadly when they were better resourced. For example, there are times when PIRA operations resulted in outcomes that the organisation would have desired – without an especially high degree of firepower, ingenuity, or even precision having been employed. And there were instances when the security forces were overstretched by the sheer volume of – hoax and real – security incidents as opposed to having been outsmarted or outgunned.

The relationship between material factors and the micro-dynamics of PIRA violence, including the significance of the varying characteristics of different weapons, environments, and targets, is also explored in part II. The academic literature commonly (and correctly) highlights that non-state belligerent parties to conflict tend to adopt less sophisticated military tactics and rely on stealth to compensate for their material inferiority.⁴⁴ In his comparative study of the form of state and non-state warfare, Stephen Biddle concluded that the character of warfare that is waged by any belligerent party to any conflict is inherently subject to material factors and will be determined, therefore, by how they choose to balance their competing lethality and survivability concerns.

The militaries who use this materiel must both inflict and survive violence. These needs, however, are in tension. To wield the sword, one must emerge from behind the shield, enabling the enemy to land a counterblow. This tension gives rise to a basic trade-off between lethality and survivability—the firepower needed to kill the enemy, versus the cover and concealment needed to survive return fire.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ See, for instance, the literature survey and the multi-case study work presented in Biddle, *Nonstate Warfare*, pp.31-33.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp.51-55.

Cato Hemmingby and Tore Bjørge's study of the Anders Behring Breivik's solo terrorist attack in Norway in June 2011 found that the perpetrator has similar concerns as they contemplated possible targets and tactics in the lead up to the attack.

This case shows that terrorist decision-making and target selection is a highly dynamic process. Moreover, many of the factors that constrained Breivik's operation and influenced his decision-making, such as lack of time, capacity and funding, are generic to most terrorists and may therefore provide insights which go beyond this particular case. The way he organized and prepared the whole operation, as well as how he handled operational security challenges, are also of general relevance.⁴⁶

This study finds that the PIRA are no different in this regard. To a large extent, the PIRA is found to have tailored their tactics to accommodate the characteristics of the weapons they had at their disposal, and the extent to which these could be used to mount effective offensive operations in different environments and against different targets. However, material factors cannot explain the PIRA's tactical level choices on every occasion.

This thesis argues that both material and political factors are essential to understanding the form of PIRA violence because they posed physical obstacles or reputational threats that could and did incentivise the PIRA to select certain targets or tactics over others.

Accordingly, the PIRA selected their targets and tactics in accordance with how significant an obstacle, pressure or threat they perceived – or misperceived – political or material factors to pose their organisational survival or operational success, whether and what alternative solutions were available to avoid or circumnavigate this, and how the

⁴⁶ Cato Hemmingby and Tore Bjørge, *The Dynamics of a Terrorist Targeting Process*, Kindle Edition (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016), p.6.

organisation weighed the possible losses or gains that might result from either action or inaction in this regard.

Each operation was to some extent unique. However, the evidence suggests that most were designed with three primary objectives in mind: hitting the target, discriminating between targets and non-targets, and surviving and escaping from the scene of the crime. There was political incentive for them to avoid causing collateral damage, there was also political incentive to take calculated risks (for example, to compete with their opponents or rivals), and material obstacles to overcome in order to do so. For this reason, it is argued that the PIRA had three (not two) competing concerns to weigh when they selected their targets and tactics: lethality, survivability, and discrimination. The ven diagram below has been designed to illustrate this argument.

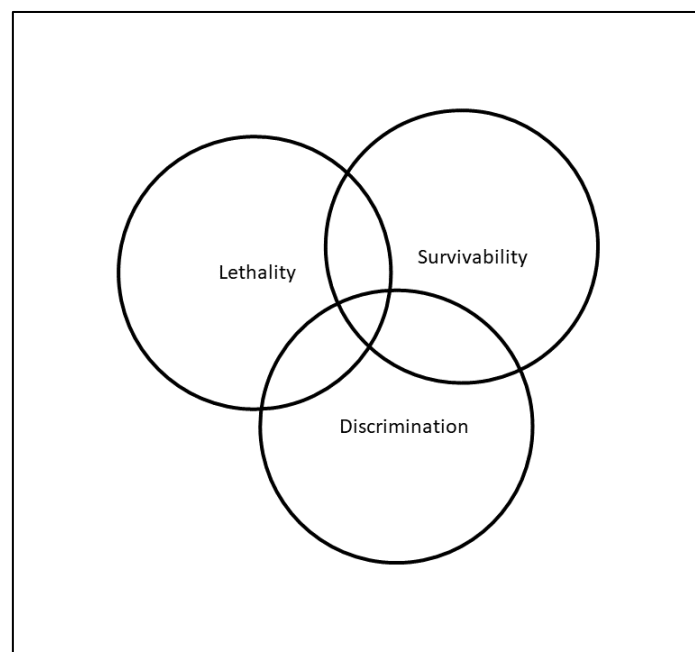


Figure 1.5 The Competing Concerns of Military and Paramilitary Agents in the Design of Tactics.

Extensive case study material is presented in part III to make this case. The case studies demonstrate that the likelihood of the PIRA attaining each of these objectives on any given occasion varied from case to case; the intensity of risk of failure on any count, that was incorporated into the design of each operation varied in accordance with the type of weapons and tactics that were involved.

On some occasions the PIRA posed a significant danger to the police or military personnel they targeted because the weapons and tactics employed were sophisticated and powerful. There were also times, however, when PIRA weapons were so unstable that they posed a greater risk to themselves than those they intended to target. In terms of discrimination, it is also apparent that there are some PIRA operations which appear to have had little to no prospect of inflicting casualties on non-combatants because they took place in remote locations and involved weapons and tactics over which the PIRA had a high degree of control. But there were occasions when the PIRA perpetrated their attacks in densely populated spaces and used weapons or tactics which did not provide any mechanism for discriminating between targets and non-combatants.

Of course, the design and the outcome of PIRA operations were not one and the same – the discrepancy which existed between what the PIRA had intended to occur, and the actual results of their operations could be vast. For this reason, it is useful to disaggregate the lifecycle of PIRA operations in their respective parts and examine the perpetrator's role in shaping each, respectively.

The outcome of PIRA operations (stillborn, thwarted, on- and off-target, with and without collateral damage) was not necessarily commensurate with the degree of risk that was incorporated into the design; only the extent to which that risk materialised. When we examine PIRA operations in detail we see that there are a few different ways it did so. Sometimes the PIRA's plans proved unfeasible because they had made some fatal error in their calculations. Other times the PIRA made tactical errors in the execution of attacks. And then there were times when forces outside the PIRA's control, such as the actions and reactions of others, fundamentally altered the trajectory of events. The actual outcome of any given PIRA operation could, therefore, be determined by both PIRA agency and subject to chance.

It is pertinent to ask whether the risks that were incorporated into the design of the PIRA's operations were foreseeable. It would be fair to say that there were times when the PIRA used weapons and tactics that they failed to anticipate could prove dangerously ineffective, or when they operated in spaces that they mistakenly believed would not be occupied by civilians ever, or at least at the time they conducted their attack. Other times, the PIRA used weapons and tactics which they knew had failed on previous occasions or allowed the outcome of their operations to rely upon the actions or reactions of the security forces or civilians in order to produce a discriminate outcome. As such, it is argued that the character of the armed struggle depended on the PIRA's ability and willingness to plan and execute violence in a manner that was likely to produce accurate and discriminate results. An original framework of analysis, the *Ability and Willingness Nexus*, is introduced in part III of

the thesis as a tool to facilitate a more nuanced discussion of the agency of the perpetrator in designing and executing incidents of political violence.

Methods and Sources

There are several individuals whose pioneering efforts to collate information and data about the conflict-related fatalities that occurred during the Troubles have resulted in widely referenced indices and datasets. These resources underpin the quantitative analysis of the PIRA campaign by other authors to date.⁴⁷

The first dataset of fatalities resulting between 1969 and 2001 was collected by independent researcher and former editor of the Belfast-based journal *Fortnight*, Michael McKeown. The most recent version of the data is free to access (and download in spreadsheet format) from the Conflict Archive on the Internet (CAIN),⁴⁸ along with guidance material and a statistical analysis by the author.⁴⁹ In the interim McKeon shared the data he had collected with the Irish Information Partnership (IIP) who built upon the work to produce new data and statistical analyses which were published between 1985 and 1989.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ For a study of PIRA violence see, for example, Robert W. White, 'The Irish Republican Army: An Assessment of Sectarianism', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 9/1, (1997), pp.20–55. For an example of a comparative quantitative study see, for instance, Håvard Hegre, Tanja Ellingsen, Scott Gates, Nils Petter Gleditsch, 'Towards a democratic civil peace? Democracy, political change, and civil war, 1816-1992', *American Political Science Review*, 95, (2001), pp.16-33; and Bill Kissane's critique of the piece: Bill Kissane, 'Democratization, State Formation, and Civil War in Finland and Ireland: A Reflection on the Democratic Peace Hypothesis', *Comparative Political Studies*, 37/8, (2004), pp. 969-985.

⁴⁸ Michael McKeown, 'Database of Deaths Associated with Violence in Northern Ireland, 1969-2001', (Version 1.1; dated 4 Feb 2013), <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/victims/mckeown/index.html>, (02/08/2022).

⁴⁹ Michael McKeown, 'Post-Mortem: An examination of the patterns of politically associated violence in Northern Ireland during the years 1969-2001 as reflected in the fatality figures for those years', (June 2009), <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/victims/mckeown/mckeown01.pdf>, (02/08/2022).

⁵⁰ Michael McKeown, *De Mortuis: A study of 2400 fatalities arising from political disturbances in Northern Ireland between July 1969 and July 1984* (Belgium: Irish Information Partnership, 1985); Irish Information

Another independent researcher, Malcolm Sutton, has collected similar data on Troubles victims, covering the period 1969 – 2001. His *Index of Deaths from Conflict in Ireland* also includes a brief description of the event in which each life was lost. An earlier version of the data (1969 – 1984) and the author's analysis of it was first published in 1994.⁵¹ A revised edition has been published as a (text) index of fatalities on CAIN, along with a revised guidance and summary document produced by the author.⁵² This online resource can be surveyed chronologically and alphabetically.

The most comprehensive index of fatalities, *Lost Lives: The Stories of the Men, Women and Children Who Died as a Result of the Northern Ireland Troubles*, was produced by journalists and historians David McKittrick, Seamus Kelters, Brian Feeney, Chris Thornton and David McVea. *Lost Lives* was first published in 1999 and was subsequently revised by the authors (this thesis uses the latest edition of the work, published in 2007 and reprinted in 2008).⁵³ The book chronicles the events in which individuals died and wider information about the victim's life story. A dataset was not published, but the authors do publish tables of statistics from the accumulative data they have collected in the appendix, including the volume of fatalities that were incurred in different locations, totals of victims grouped by status (civilian, security force, or republican paramilitary for example), and totals of victims that different organisations have been attributed responsibility for causing.

Partnership, *Agenda: Information Service on Northern Ireland and Anglo- Irish Relations* (London: Irish Information Partnership, (1989), 6th edition.

⁵¹ Malcolm Sutton, *Bear in mind these dead: An Index of Deaths from the Conflict in Ireland 1969-1993* (Belfast, 1994).

⁵² Malcolm Sutton, 'An Index of Deaths from Conflict in Ireland', <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/sutton/index.html>, (02/08/2022); Malcom Sutton, 'Revised and Updated Extracts from Sutton's Book', <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/sutton/book/index.html>, (02/08/2022).

⁵³ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*.

McKeown, Sutton and McKittrick *et al.* have adopted slightly different approaches to coding their data; they come to broadly similar conclusions, nevertheless. For instance, if we recast data they have coded using different subcategories under the umbrella categorisations of perpetrator affiliations to either republican or loyalist paramilitaries, security forces or 'other' – the datasets are closely aligned.

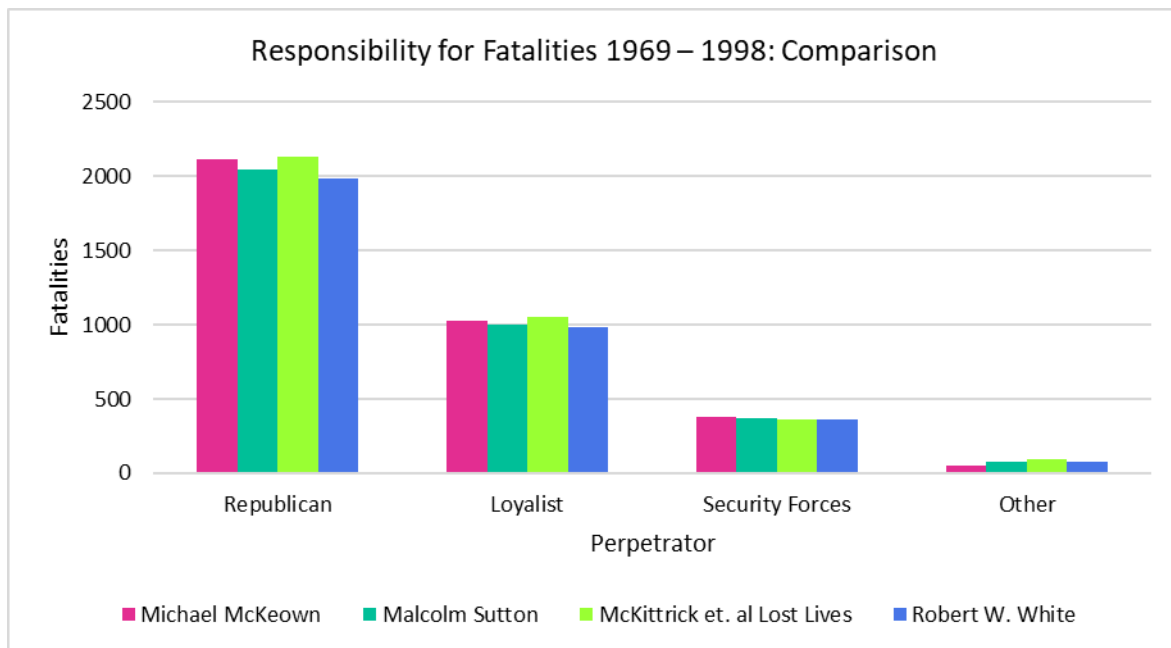


Figure 1.6 Responsibility for Fatalities 1969 – 1998: Comparison.

Sources: Adapted from: McKeown, 'Database of Deaths'; Sutton, *Index of Deaths*; 'Table 2 - Responsibility for Deaths' in McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, p.1553.

Another open-access data set that is commonly used is there The Global Terrorism Database (GTD) which is an open-source database that captures basic information about incidents of political violence that have occurred around the world between 1970 and 2020.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ The Global Terrorism Database™ (GTD), available at: <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/>.

Statistical analyses of the Troubles to date have drawn upon these sources. Without further context, however, the data can form unrepresentative samples of evidence, for example, because they bias fatal incidents over non-fatal incidents of violence. McKeown, Sutton and the authors of *Lost Lives* have captured information exclusively about fatal incidents of violence. At the time of writing, the Global Terrorism Database includes 3205 incidents of political violence occurring between in the United Kingdom between 1970 and 1998 that are attributed to loyalist and republican paramilitary groups: 1823 of which resulted in fatalities, 1232 which did not, and 150 where this detail is marked as unknown.⁵⁵ Yet the conflict – which claimed the lives of more than 3,500 people⁵⁶ – included over 35,000 shooting incidents and 10,000 explosions.⁵⁷ This indicates that episodes of violence that claimed the lives of one or more individuals represent less than 10% of the total violence that occurred.

The research findings published in relation to the statistical analysis of the data (which is not publicly available) that was collected for the “From Bomb to Bomb-Maker” project by Victor Asal, Paul Gill, R. Karl Rethemeyer, and John Horgan corroborates this claim. Only 8.7 percent of the total incidents reviewed by the project team (5,461 incidents that involved a

⁵⁵ The Global Terrorism Database™ (GTD), available at: <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/>, (07/08/2022) using search criteria: Country: (United Kingdom) – All incidents regardless of doubt; Years: (between 1970 and 1998); Perpetrators: (Continuity Irish Republican Army (CIRA); Irish National Liberation Army (INLA); Irish People's Liberation Organization (IPLO); Irish Republican Army (IRA); Official Irish Republican Army (OIRA); Oglagh na hEireann; Orange Volunteers (OV); Protestant Action Group; Real Irish Republican Army (RIRA); Real Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF) – Northern Ireland; Red Hand Commandos; Red Hand Defenders (RHD); Republican Action Against Drugs (RAAD); Republican Action Force; Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF); Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF)).

⁵⁶ Between 1969 and 1998: there were 3635 deaths resulting from the conflict according to ‘Table 1 - Deaths by Year and Status’, in McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, p.1552.

⁵⁷ Between 1969 and 1998, there were 35,669 conflict-related shooting incidents and 10,026 explosions that occurred between 1969 and 1998. See, for instance, ‘Table NI-SEC-06: Security related incidents (number) in Northern Ireland (only), shootings, bombings, and incendiaries, 1969 to 2003’, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/ni/security.htm#injury>, (02-08-2022).

PIRA IED) resulted in the death of one or more persons.⁵⁸ The implication is that a fatality-centric quantitative analysis of Provisional IRA violence is likely to be misleading without further qualification because fatal violence represents only a fraction of the PIRA's activities.

What is more, it is equally problematic that non-fatal violence is rarely featured as a case study in qualitative analyses of the subject. Select high-profile or shocking episodes of PIRA violence have tended to attract a disproportionate volume of media coverage, have been recycled in memoirs and historical accounts, and become synonymous with various interpretations of the organisation as a consequence: the Birmingham Pub bombings or Enniskillen Remembrance Sunday bombs as terrorism, civilian-centric targeting or the deliberate incursion of civilian casualties; and the Kingsmill(s) Massacre and the sectarianism debate.

What is significant about this thesis, by comparison, is the volume and range of PIRA violence that is disaggregated and assessed. It considers a wide variety of operation designs and outcomes including, for example: fatal and non-fatal acts of violence; targeted assassinations that were planned and executed as intended; operations that were stillborn, off-target, or thwarted by the security forces; attacks that maimed or killed unintended targets; and acts that were never intended to and did not cause physical harm to others. In doing so, the thesis provides a richer account of the relationship between PIRA agency,

⁵⁸ The wider project involved the coding of 5,461 incidents that involved a PIRA Improvised Explosive Device (IED): Victor Asal, Paul Gill, R. Karl Rethemeyer, and John Horgan, 'Killing Range: Explaining Lethality Variance within a Terrorist Organization', *Conflict Resolution* (2015), 59/3, pp. 401-427.

chance, and the character and consequences of PIRA violence than has hitherto been possible.

The full range of characteristics apparent in the PIRA campaign may never be exposed, but the rich sources of evidence that exist provide the opportunity to explore the subject matter in greater depth. It is unlikely that any sample of evidence will truly epitomise the subject, hence, it is important to think critically about the representativeness of the sample of evidence selected and may be necessary to account for any gaps and silences, or limit research claims accordingly.⁵⁹

The significance of either quantitative and qualitative sources of evidence can deceive the researcher of violence if they become divorced from critical elements of their micro- and macro-context. Datasets and statistics relating to the Northern Ireland conflict can be misleading when they lack key information and detail about the events to which they relate. Tables of aggregate data that chart who killed whom, and how many of which religion, can tell us no more about the nature of the events in which individuals lost their lives than the organisations responsible. Victim status – combatant or non-combatant, Protestant or Catholic – is not a definitive indication of perpetrator motive. Data collected about the characteristics of the individuals who lost their lives to acts of PIRA violence is insufficient to probe the perpetrators' intentions, drill down into the detail of what can be quite distinct

⁵⁹ Lars-Erik Cederman, Manuel Vogt, Daniel Druckman, Paul K Huth, Sandler, Todd, 'Dynamics and Logics of Civil War', (2017), pp.1998-1999, 2007-2008.

events or offer any scope to disaggregate them. All are key elements of interpreting the meaning and significance of fatality statistics. For, as historian Richard Bessel observes:

Before jumping to the conclusion that a rise or fall in the number of murders reported over time in a particular jurisdiction necessarily reflects a rise or fall in the level of violence, it is worth considering how a corpse becomes a murder case.⁶⁰

Authors who have a strong research background in the subject are better placed to understand the dynamics of the events which the data represents. Brendan O’Leary’s audit of violence after 1966 (2019) is a good example of this.⁶¹ The author has cross-referenced various sources of data and used this information to present a detailed breakdown of violence by region and perpetrator, among other things (still, non-fatal violence is beyond the scope of even this rich study of political violence). But the meaning of other conflict data seems to have been misinterpreted in other studies.⁶²

Nodal events can sometimes become separated from critical elements of their narrative when truncated for concision in qualitative studies which, depending on the reader’s familiarity with the subject matter at hand, could potentially have a similarly misleading result. A key example is when the January 1976 Kingsmills Massacre – an incident when the Provisional IRA shot 11 protestant civilians (killing 10 of them) – is offered as example of the PIRA engaging in a programme of sectarian assassinations, without any reference to the

⁶⁰ Richard Bessel, 'Assessing Violence in the Modern World', *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques*, 44/1, (2018), p.68.

⁶¹ O’Leary, *A Treatise: Volume I*, pp.27-105.

⁶² For example, a 2018 study appears to have employed data relating to annual punishment attacks perpetrated by the Catholic and Protestant communities in Northern Ireland, on the presumption that the data pertains to episodes of inter- rather than intra- communal violence. F. LeRon Shultsa, Ross Goreb, Wesley J. Wildmanc, Christopher Lynchb, Justin E. Laned and Monica Tofte, 'A Generative Model of the Mutual Escalation of Anxiety Between Religious Groups', *Journal of Artificial Societies and Social Simulation*, 21/4, (2018), Doi: 10.18564/jasss.3840.

immediate and broader context;⁶³ it is not trivial that the proceeding evening loyalist paramilitaries shot and killed six Catholic civilians from two families, and that tit-for-tat, reciprocal killings had been occurring on either side for more than a year.⁶⁴

Sampling a large and varied body of evidence can provide scope for conceptual disaggregation and a greater degree of precision in measuring. Researchers can improve the representativeness and reliability of the inferences they draw by cross-referencing multiple sources of evidence, or 'triangulation'. Or they can turn to the secondary literature to better understand how their research findings might be placed in context: to explore how the research findings of a micro investigation or macro model scale up or down respectively.⁶⁵

This thesis presents the combined findings of extensive qualitative and quantitative research, based on a broad and representative sample of primary and secondary evidence. The work has involved the compilation and analysis of new historical data, acute case-study analysis, and an examination of the changing dynamics of PIRA activity at the macro- and micro-level. Specifically, the author has conducted extensive background research, detailed case studies research, and collected original historical data. A study of PIRA activities in this level of detail and scale has not previously been attempted.

⁶³ See for example, Timothy Shanahan, *The Provisional Irish Republican Army and the Morality of Terrorism* (Edinburgh, 2009), p.34; James Dingley, *The IRA: The Irish Republican Army* (Santa Barbara, 2012), pp.136-137.

⁶⁴ See McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 1560-1561, 1562-1564.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

To study PIRA violence at the micro-level, detailed primary source material that can provide key insights into the defining features of single events and their determinants have been examined. At a minimum, the McKeown index, Sutton index, *Lost Lives*, and chronologies of the conflict recorded by Richard Deutsch and Vivian Magowan (1969 to 1973)⁶⁶, David Barzilay (1969 to 1980)⁶⁷, the *Fortnight* journal (1970 – 1980),⁶⁸ have been consulted to assess each incident of fatal violence that it is plausible to link with PIRA activity between 1969 and 1979. Where it has been possible to access the evidence and match cases to evidence, the author has also consulted further sources including: *Belfast Graves* (a nationalist publication that details republican casualties)⁶⁹, *Ardoyne: The Untold Truth* (an account of fatalities occurring in the Ardoyne district of Belfast by the Ardoyne Commemoration Project)⁷⁰, coroner inquest reports⁷¹, court reports, periodic summaries of security event reports composed by the military (discussed in further detail below), newspaper reports, various rolls of honour,⁷² and accounts of incidents recorded in paramilitary, military or political memoirs.⁷³

⁶⁶ Deutsch and Magowan, *Volume 1*; Deutsch and Magowan, *Volume 2*; Deutsch and Magowan, *Volume 3*.

⁶⁷ David Barzilay, *The British Army in Ulster, Volume 1* (Belfast, 1973); David Barzilay, *The British Army in Ulster, Volume 2* (Belfast, 1975); David Barzilay, *The British Army in Ulster, Volume 3* (Belfast, 1978); David Barzilay, *The British Army in Ulster, Volume 4* (Belfast, 1981).

⁶⁸ *Fortnight*.

⁶⁹ The National Graves Association, *Belfast Graves* (Dublin, 1985).

⁷⁰ Ardoyne Commemoration Project, *Ardoyne: The Untold Truth* (Belfast, 2002).

⁷¹ 70 Inquest reports, primarily relating to cases where PIRA was the perpetrator or deceased that occurred during the 1970s. All held at PRONI.

⁷² Republican Roll of Honour/ Liosta Laochra na Poblachta 1969-2012', *An Phoblacht*, 29 March 2012, <https://www.anphoblacht.com/roll-of-honour>, (20/03/2022); The Regimental Association of The Ulster Defence Regiment CGC, 'Roll of Honour', <https://www.ulsterdefenceregimentassociation.com/roll-of-honour>, (20/03/2022); 'Garda Síochána Roll of Honour', <https://www.garda.ie/en/about-us/our-history/roll-of-honour/>, (22/04/2022).

⁷³ For example, Conway, *Southside Provisional*; Mac Stiofáin, *Memoirs*; McKearney, *The Provisional IRA*; Collins, *Killing Rage*; Sean O'Callaghan, *The Informer* (London, 1998); Kevin Fulton with Jim Nally and Ian Gallagher, *Double Agent: My Secret Life Undercover in the IRA* (London, 2006); Lieutenant-Colonel Michael Dewar, *The British Army in Northern Ireland* (London, 1985). Brigadier Peter Morton, *Emergency Tour: 3 PARA in South Armagh* (Wellingborough, 1989); Peter, Gurney, *Braver Men Walk Away* (London, 1993). FitzGerald, *All in a Life*.

These rich sources can provide key insights into the character of a single event: whether a PIRA attack was spontaneous or planned, precise or clumsy, accurate or bungled; whether those who died had been the intended target of an attack and if not, why it was that they fell victim to violence which had not been intended to kill them. In other words, this qualitative research is a vital part of establishing a picture of PIRA violence which represents the breadth of variety that characterized it.

An original historical dataset has also been collected from the case study research to allow the author to analyse the PIRA campaign statistically.⁷⁴ It pertains to 1116 separate fatalities which occurred in 798 separate incidents between 1970 and 1979. These include 1046 cases over of which there is broad agreement that the PIRA were responsible,⁷⁵ 32 cases where the sources suggest it is likely that the perpetrator was the PIRA, but other perpetrators cannot be ruled out,⁷⁶ 25 cases where there is insufficient evidence to identify a perpetrator from a specific group but there is reason to believe that republican paramilitaries may have been involved,⁷⁷ and 13 cases where fatalities have been connected with PIRA activity on some level, but the cause of death is not reported to have been a direct result of PIRA actions. The latter includes, for instance, car collisions with PIRA

⁷⁴ Rachel Kowalski, DPhil Dataset, (2022), thereafter Kowalski, DPhil Dataset.

⁷⁵ For example, where at least the PIRA was the perpetrator in McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*; Sutton, *Index of Deaths*; and McKeown, 'Database of Deaths'. (Earlier editions of these and earlier published works can sometimes attribute responsibility elsewhere, based on the information that was available at the time).

⁷⁶ For instance, when the sources note that the PIRA is believed to have been responsible for a fatal shooting attack but highlight that police, soldiers or paramilitaries could have fired the round that claimed the life in question.

⁷⁷ It is important to do so because, even though the information that surrounds these events can be murky or contested, many are incidents of sectarian assassination.

roadblocks, or individuals who suffered heart attacks when witnessing PIRA bombing or shooting attacks or becoming aware that they had been bereaved as a result of them.

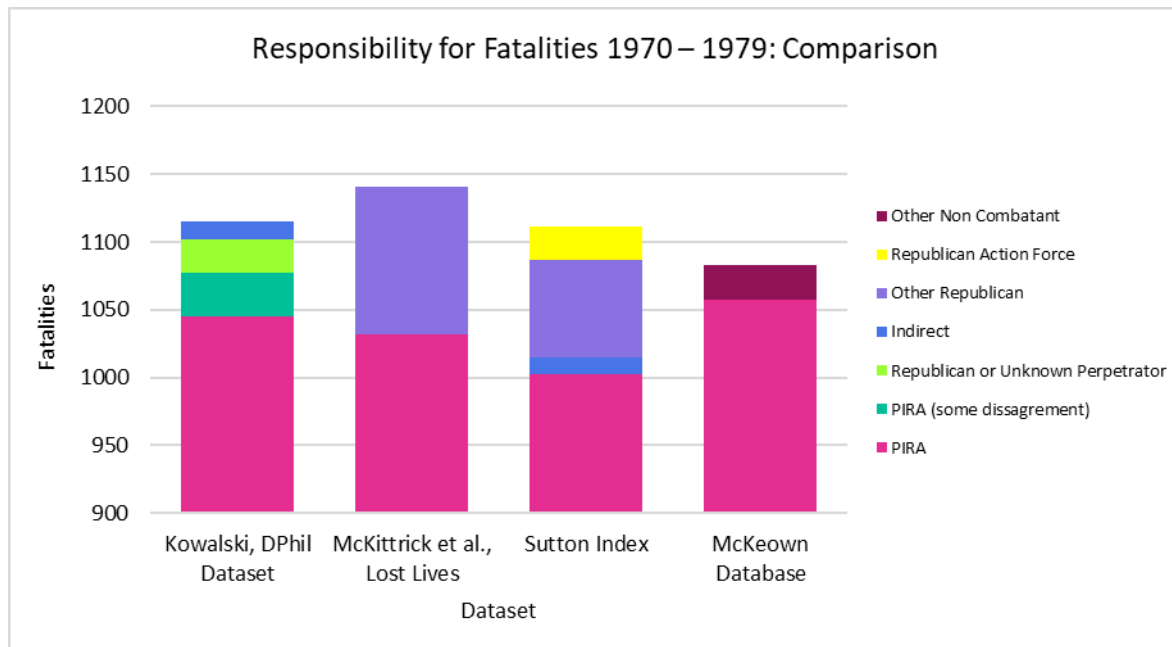


Figure 1.7 Responsibility for Fatalities 1970 – 1979: Comparison.

Sources: adapted from: Kowalski, DPhil Dataset; 'Table 2 - Responsibility for Deaths' in McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, p.1553; McKeown, 'Database of Deaths'; Sutton, *Index of Deaths*.

In terms of the maximum number of fatalities that might be attributed to the PIRA in this period, the dataset collected by the author broadly aligns with both McKittrick *et al.* *Lost Lives* and the Sutton Index. The main difference in coding is that Malcom Sutton has coded the fatalities for which responsibility was claimed by the PIRA pseudonym 'Republican Action Force' separately and does not include fatalities resulting from vehicle collisions. The authors of *Lost Lives* code a higher volume of fatalities as attributed to 'other republican' because it seems, they include the small volume of fatalities that are attributed to smaller (non-PIRA) republican groups (such as Saor Éire, People's Liberation Army and People's

Republican Army) under this broad heading, whereas Malcom Sutton has disaggregated them, and this author has excluded them from analysis for the purpose of focussing on the PIRA. And the McKeown database is slightly less comprehensive as it does not include fatalities resulting from heart attacks and vehicle collisions.

The data that has been collected by the author is more detailed than that which has been previously coded for the same events. The primary pieces of information collected for each case (by combing primary source evidence) include: incident date and location; victim/fatality name, affiliation/status and date of death; perpetrator name and affiliation/status; weapon category and subcategory/type; tactic category and details; volume of fatalities and injuries caused and outcome type. These categories of data were established over an extended period – the sources were checked and rechecked, and the data was coded and recoded as it became apparent to the author which aspects of each event it was important to identify. The author's decisions in this regard were also influenced by the literature on cognitive bias.⁷⁸ In every case the author has collected objective material information as opposed to coding subjective interpretations of events. Additionally, the author established a strict coding system to reduce the likelihood of an inconsistencies occurring as the data is coded because of inconsistent judgements on the part of the author (i.e., an 'if – then' rule system), as recommended by Daniel Kahneman, Oliver Sibony and Cass R. Sunstein in *Noise: A Flaw in Human Judgement* (2021):

The combination of personal patterns and occasion noise weighs so heavily on the quality of human judgement that simplicity and noiselessness are sizeable

⁷⁸ Kahneman, *Thinking*; Van Woensel, *A Bias Radar*.

advantages. Simple rules that are merely sensible typically do better than human judgement.⁷⁹

This data has been collected over a period of eight years – but is still considered a work-in-progress by the author. It has become apparent that it is not uncommon for incorrect information to have been reported about critical aspects of fatal events – including the weapon or tactic used. Secondly, even the most reliable and detailed source material cannot always clarify the details for example, of the weapons were destroyed beyond the point of identification, or events that were not witnessed by others.⁸⁰ Still, the dataset is sufficiently robust at this stage to make indicative inferences possible.

Other sources have been examined to provide the author with insights into the changing character or intensity of PIRA activity over the longer-term. The CAIN project team have captured and presented some data that pertains to non-fatal violence. These include official annual police statistics concerning the number of people killed and injured as a result of the security situation; the strength (number) of security forces including the RUC, UDR and British Army; and the volume of shooting, bombing and punishment attacks that occurred.⁸¹

The daily, weekly, fortnightly, and monthly reporting of security incidents contained in military records have also been consulted. Commander's Diary records catalogue the

⁷⁹ Daniel Kahneman, Oliver Sibony and Cass R. Sunstein in *Noise: A Flaw in Human Judgement* Kindle edition (William Collins, 2021), p.158.

⁸⁰ Bruce Cochrane, 'The development of the British approach to improvised explosive device disposal in Northern Ireland', Unpublished Thesis (2015), pp.153-154, <http://dspace.lib.cranfield.ac.uk/handle/1826/9581>, (22-03-2017).

⁸¹ See for example tables Table NI-SEC-01, Table NI-SEC-02, Table NI-SEC-03, Table NI-SEC-04, Table NI-SEC-05, Table NI-SEC-06, Table NI-SEC-11, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/ni/security.htm#injury>, (02/08/2022).

security incident reports (initial and subsequent updates) that were logged by the military throughout the day for the whole of Northern Ireland, or a region of it (these can be in excess of 500 entries per day).⁸² Several calendar months' worth of these records for the period 1970 to 1973 have been examined.⁸³ The author has also acquired and consulted the weekly, fortnightly or monthly summary of security incidents reports produced by the Northern Ireland Office for the majority of the 1973 – 1980 period.⁸⁴ This very detailed

⁸² Commander's Diary HQ Northern Ireland (whole of NI coverage), HQ 39th Infantry Brigade Commander's Diary (Belfast and East Northern Ireland coverage), HQ 8th Infantry Brigade Commander's Diary (that covered Derry and North/North-West Northern Ireland), and HQ 3rd Infantry Brigade Commander's Diary (covered South Armagh).

⁸³ HQ 39th Infantry Brigade, 'Commanders Diary 01 May - 31 May 1971', TNA, WO 305/4246. Thereafter: 'HG39 Diary, May 71', TNA, WO 305/4246; HQ 39th Infantry Brigade, 'Commander's Diary HQ 39 Inf Bde, 01 - 30 June 1971', TNA, WO 305/4247. Thereafter: 'HQ39 Diary, June 71', TNA, WO 305/4247; HQ 39th Infantry Brigade, 'Commander's Diary HQ 39 Inf Bde, 01 - 31 July 1971', TNA, WO 305/4247. Thereafter: 'Diary HQ39', TNA, WO 305/4247. Thereafter: 'HQ39 Diary, July 71', TNA, WO 305/4247; HQ 39th Infantry Brigade, 'Commander's Diary HQ 39 Inf Bde, 01 - 30 April 1972', TNA, WO 305/4249. Thereafter: 'HQ39 Diary, April 72', TNA, WO 305/4249; Northern Ireland Command, 'HQNI Commander's Diary, 01 April 1972 - 31 May 1972', TNA, WO 305/4199. Thereafter: 'HQNI Diary, April - May 72', TNA, WO 305/4199; HQ 3rd Infantry Brigade, 'Commander's Diary HQ 3 Inf Bde, 01 May 1972 - 30 June 1972', TNA, WO 305/4209. Thereafter: 'HQ3 Diary, May - June 72', TNA, WO 305/4209; HQ 39th Infantry Brigade, 'Commander's Diary HQ 39 Inf Bde, 01 - 31 May 1972', TNA, WO 305/4250. Thereafter: 'HQ39 Diary, May 72', TNA, WO 305/4250; HQ 3rd Infantry Brigade, 'Commander's Diary HQ 3 Inf Bde, 01 - 31 Jan 1973', TNA, WO 305/4210. Thereafter: 'HQ3 Diary, January 73', TNA, WO 305/4210; HQ 3rd Infantry Brigade, 'Commander's Diary HQ 3 Inf Bde, 01 - 28 February 1973', TNA, WO 305/4211. Thereafter: 'HQ3 Diary, February 73', TNA, WO 305/4211; HQ 3rd Infantry Brigade, 'Commander's Diary HQ 3 Inf Bde, 01 - 30 April 1973', TNA, WO 305/4212. Thereafter: 'HQ3 Diary, April 73', TNA, WO 305/4212; HQ 3rd Infantry Brigade, 'Commander's Diary HQ 3 Inf Bde, 01 - 31 May 1973', TNA, WO 305/4213. Thereafter: 'HQ3 Diary May 73', TNA, WO 305/4213; HQ 3rd Infantry Brigade, 'Commander's Diary HQ 3 Inf Bde, 01 - 30 June 1973', TNA, WO 305/4214. Thereafter: 'HQ3 Diary, June 73', TNA, WO 305/4213; HQ 3rd Infantry Brigade, 'Commander's Diary HQ 3 Inf Bde, 01 - 31 August 1973', TNA, WO 305/4216. Thereafter: 'HQ3 Diary, August 73', TNA, WO 305/4216; HQ 3rd Infantry Brigade, 'Commander's Diary HQ 3 Inf Bde, 01 - 30 September 1973', TNA, WO 305/4217. Thereafter: 'HQ3 Diary, September 73', TNA, WO 305/4217; HQ 3rd Infantry Brigade, 'Commander's Diary HQ 3 Inf Bde, 01 - 31 October 1973', TNA, WO 305/4218. Thereafter: 'HQ3 Diary, October 73', TNA, WO 305/4218; HQ 3rd Infantry Brigade, 'Commander's Diary HQ 3 Inf Bde, 01 - 31 November 1973', TNA, WO 305/4219. Thereafter: 'HQ3 Diary, Nov 73', TNA, WO 305/4219; HQ 3rd Infantry Brigade, 'Commander's Diary HQ 3 Inf Bde, 01 - 31 December 1973', TNA, WO 305/4220. Thereafter: 'HQ3 Diary, December 73', TNA, WO 305/4220.

⁸⁴ Northern Ireland Office, 'Security events in Northern Ireland: weekly summaries 1973', TNA, CJ 4/1024. Thereafter: 'NIO Summary 1973', TNA, CJ 4/1024; Northern Ireland Office, 'Security situation in Northern Ireland: fortnightly summaries of events 1974-1975', TNA, CJ 4/1787. Thereafter: 'NIO Summary 1974-1975', TNA, TNA, CJ 4/1787; Northern Ireland Office, 'Monthly security statistics: commentaries and accompanying minutes 1975 -1976', TNA, CJ 4/1237. Thereafter: 'NIO Summary 1975-1976', TNA, CJ 4/1237; Northern Ireland Office, 'Northern Ireland summary of security events: fortnightly summaries of events 1977-1980', TNA, CJ 4/3692. Thereafter: 'NIO Summary 1977-1978', TNA, CJ 4/3692; Northern Ireland Office, 'Northern Ireland summary of security events: Monthly Summaries of events June 1977 - August 1978', TNA, CJ 4/2297. Thereafter: 'NIO Summary 1977-1978', TNA, CJ 4/2297; Northern Ireland Office, 'Northern Ireland summary of security events: Monthly Summaries of events October 1978 - August 1979', TNA, CJ 4/2915. Thereafter: 'NIO Summary 1978-1979', TNA, CJ 4/2915; Northern Ireland Office, 'Northern Ireland summary of security events:

source material has also been used in the case study research and data collation described above as and when the records pertain to the incidents when lives were lost as a result of PIRA violence.

Monthly Summaries of events September 1979 - August 1980', TNA, CJ 4/3095. Thereafter: 'NIO Summary 1979-1978', TNA, CJ 4/3095.

Part I

The Politics of Armed Struggle

The principal objective of part I is to examine the relationship between political factors and the character of the armed struggle. The strategy of the PIRA campaign is outlined, before the connection between the PIRA's choice of targets and tactics, and their expectations of how those decisions might be perceived by others, is explored.

PIRA Logic

The PIRA expressed a clear sense of their purpose and justification for being in their public rhetoric from the outset. The statements, leaflets, posters, and publications they issued framed the conflict as an anti-colonial insurgency and the PIRA as freedom fighters. Their objectives were broadcast in the public news media.⁸⁵ Their primary goal was to end 'foreign rule in Ireland' and bring about a united and fully independent Irish republic.⁸⁶ The attainment of this objective would, more specifically, involve the total reversal of the 1921 partition of Ireland including the destruction of both states in Ireland. But, more immediately, the organisation would focus on their second, short-term goal: providing communal defence for the Catholic minority population in Northern Ireland. This entailed armed resistance to or violent reprisals for the significant attacks on Catholic areas by members of the Protestant community which, the PIRA claimed had not been sufficiently addressed by the (pre-split) IRA in the summer and autumn of 1969.

⁸⁵ English, *Does Terrorism Work?*, p.100.

⁸⁶ PIRA, *Freedom Struggle*, p.11.

The PIRA claimed their campaign of guerrilla warfare was to be fought for total victory. Full British withdrawal and total reunification of Ireland was the only acceptable solution to the Irish question: '[W]e can state confidently today that there will be no ceasefire and no truces until Britain declares its intent to withdraw and leave our people in peace.'⁸⁷ The agenda they agreed in January 1970 was to ramp up their activities gradually over time. There were expected to be three distinct phases of activity: first defence, then retaliation 'against whomever it required', followed finally by a 'full-blown armed offensive against the British presence in Ireland'.⁸⁸

The PIRA claimed it was both necessary and justifiable to pursue the end of 'foreign rule in Ireland' by force.⁸⁹ This claim was sometimes argued for on the basis that peaceful protest and constitutional politics had already proven to be insufficient and ineffective.⁹⁰ It was claimed that the previous experience of the civil rights movement had demonstrated that engagement in constitutional politics was fruitless, and the state of Northern Ireland was incapable of achieving any real degree of change: 'Half a century after its foundation, Northern Ireland had grown into a political entity that could not reform itself'.⁹¹ Most often, however, the PIRA dismissed any argument in favour of limited political aims or non-violent means as irrelevant, for in their view, in addition to being unfair, undemocratic, and irreformable, the northern polity was also illegitimate. The PIRA contended for the essential sovereignty of the island of Ireland as a whole and resolutely denied the legitimacy

⁸⁷ PIRA spokesperson, *An Phoblacht / Republican News*, 17 August 1989, quoted in English, *Does Terrorism Work?*, p.103.

⁸⁸ Kieran Conway, *Southside Provisional: From Freedom Fighter to the Four Courts* (Dublin, 2014), pp.22-23.

⁸⁹ PIRA, *Freedom Struggle*, p.11.

⁹⁰ Ian Cobain, *Anatomy of a Killing: Life and Death on a divided Island* (London, 2020), p.18.

⁹¹ Tommy McKearney, *The Provisional IRA: From Insurrection to Parliament* (London, 2011), p.29.

of partition, which they saw as the mutilation of Irish national self-determination. Hence, the idea that the majority population of Northern Ireland (unionist and Protestant) could or should have a veto over the Irish question was anathema to their logic. This position diverges from the constitutional Irish nationalist position that maintains the importance of the democratic process and is illustrated neatly by the words of Garret FitzGerald (former Fine Gael politician, and twice Taoiseach of the Republic of Ireland, 1981-1982 and 1982-1987):

whatever we might think of partition, and however much we might feel that the division of the island had been damaging to its peace and prosperity, given that this division had become an established fact it could and should be ended only with the consent of a majority in Northern Ireland.⁹²

In line with their orthodox, physical-force republican perspective, the PIRA were clear that they did not recognise the authority of the existing governments (Stormont, Westminster, or 'Leinster House'); and by extension the police and military forces they maintained.

Instead, the PIRA believed-themselves to be the only legitimate successor to the Provisional government established in 1919:

We declare our allegiance to the Thirty-Two County Irish Republic proclaimed at Easter 1916, established by the first Dáil Éireann in 1919, overthrown by force of arms in 1922, and suppressed to this day by the British-imposed Six County and Twenty-Six County partitionist states.⁹³

⁹² Garret FitzGerald, *All in a Life* (Dublin, 1991), p. 88; Gareth Ivory, 'Revisions in nationalist discourse among Irish political parties', *Irish Political Studies*, 14/1 (1999), pp. 84-103.

⁹³ Statement issued by the Republican Publicity Bureau, 28 December 1969, cited in Mac Stiofáin, *Memoirs*, p.142.

Denying the legitimacy of the political status quo was a critical component of the PIRA's (self-perceived) justification for their campaign of political violence.⁹⁴ For, as Billy McKee (a founding member and leader of the Provisional Irish Republican Army) explained:

Let's put it this way. If you start to recognize the Twenty-six County Government, you've no right to have an IRA there. You've no right to go out and rob banks or rob anybody. You've no right to take life because they're your people and they're your government.⁹⁵

This ideological position imbued the tone and terms of reference (publicly) adopted by individual representatives of the organisation at all levels, from the PIRA leadership to the rank-and-file. Former volunteers emphasise the centrality of anti-colonial sentiment to their personal motivation for participating in organised violence. Gerry Bradley (a former PIRA member who was based primarily in the Belfast area between 1974-1994) recalls: 'We saw ourselves defending people against an occupying army which was coming into our district every day, wrecking all round them, and their reason for being in the North at all was to shore up an unjust regime, just as the British army had always done in Ireland.'⁹⁶ The leadership of both the PIRA and Sinn Féin made claims to solidarity with other national liberation groups. In 1983 Martin McGuinness, then president of Sinn Féin is quoted as having claimed: 'Our heroes are all the people who fight for national liberation, for example, those of El Salvador, Nicaragua, Vietnam and Cuba'.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Mulholland, *Short Introduction*, p.75.

⁹⁵ Quoted in Peter Taylor, *The Provos: the IRA and Sinn Féin* (London, 1998), p.66.

⁹⁶ Gerry Bradley with Brian Feeney, *Insider: Gerry Bradley's Life in the IRA* (Dublin, 2009), p.80.

⁹⁷ 'UK Factual Paper on Irish Republican Army – IRA: Letter Hannay to John Poindexter', 25 March 1985, p.30, Oliver North Files Collection, US-British (03/25/1985-05/15/1985), Box 14, Reference: 31550, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library Digital Library Collections, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitallibrary/snof/nsc-politicalandmilitaryaffairs/north/box-014/40-633-12015544-014-011-2018.pdf>, (12/07/2021).

(Physical force) republican ideology was also a key force in determining the manner in which the PIRA conducted their campaign of political violence (the armed struggle): it underwrote what they claimed to be the purpose of and justification for their insurgency, and thereby directed their decision-making over how to actually apply violence or, in other words, their choices regarding the targets they selected and the tactics they employed.

The PIRA believed themselves to have the right to perpetrate both anti-property violence – attacks against economic targets and infrastructure – and anti-personnel violence – attacks which target people.⁹⁸ The PIRA were also (for the most part) explicit about who and what this violence could and would be directed towards. The organisation made clear in their 1973 publication *Freedom Struggle*, for instance, that legitimate targets of assassination included ‘Crown Forces’ – members of British state security forces including various wings of the military, police forces – and ‘Collaborators’ – that is individuals who were perceived (by PIRA) to play an active role in furthering ‘the stranglehold of the enemy’. Targets of lethal assassination on this basis, the booklet explains, included ‘civilians in para-military guise, touts, spies’ or those who owned or worked for companies that provided materials or services to the military or police force.⁹⁹

The PIRA claimed that legitimate targets of anti-property violence included the spaces in which the individuals on their list of so-called legitimate targets dwelt, in addition to various elements of infrastructure.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, *Freedom Struggle* explains that the PIRA believed

⁹⁸ PIRA, *Freedom Struggle*, pp.1-8.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.1-8.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

legitimate targets of anti-property violence included 'customs offices, administrative and government buildings, electricity transformers and pylons', 'military and police barracks, outposts', and buildings in which services 'provide relaxation and personal comforts' or 'contributed to the well-being of Her Majesty's invading forces' including: 'cinemas, hotels, clubs, dance halls, pubs' or 'factories, firms, stores'.

The PIRA also clearly stated that civilians (except for those they defined as collaborators) were not the intended target of their armed struggle:

Our whole campaign has been geared to avoid civilian casualties. There is no underground army in the world that tries so hard to protect civilians from injury. We strike at economic, political, and judicial targets.¹⁰¹

The PIRA emphasised more specifically that Protestant or unionist civilians were not the target of their campaign of political violence.¹⁰² Moreover, they vehemently rejected all claims that they were a sectarian organisation or selected their targets with a sectarian bias. For instance, an article published in *An Phoblacht* (the official newspaper publication of Provisional Sinn Féin, re-founded following the split in the political party in January 1970) in the wake of the Birmingham Pub Bombings (November 1974) sought to dispel any notion that the PIRA violence was either intentionally directed towards civilian or sectarian targets: 'Their war is against the British army and its agents. It is not directed against Protestants.'¹⁰³ The memoirs of former PIRA members also highlight the organisation's desire to divorce itself from accusations that it was motivated by sectarian agenda. Eamon Collins (PIRA

¹⁰¹ *Dáithí Ó Conaill*, November 1974, cited in Ken Wharton, *Wasted Years, Wasted Lives, Volume 1: The British Army in Northern Ireland, 1975-77* (Solihul, 2013), pp.282-292.

¹⁰² See, for instance, IRA Statement issued following the killing of Ann Parker in a premature PIRA explosion in West Belfast, 11 August 1972, cited in McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 535.

¹⁰³ *An Phoblacht*, 22 November 1974, p.2.

member in the 1970s and 80s, who subsequently turned his back on the organisation from the late 1980s onwards) explained that the PIRA: 'sought to avoid any operations which had *obviously* sectarian overtones: a policeman could be justified as a legitimate target, his non-combatant Protestant family could not.'¹⁰⁴

A notable exception to the PIRA's position regarding the non-targeting of civilians was their self-claimed right to enforce martial law. Fulfilling the role of the Provisional government of the Republic included, in the group's view, standing as the replacement provider of the associated policing and justice services. Moreover, the PIRA held that no interest group or minority was justified in denying complete unfettered Irish independence. Rather, they demanded the complete loyalty of all Irish citizens and maintained their prerogative to avenge any treachery in this regard.¹⁰⁵ Accordingly, the PIRA applied (mostly non-fatal) violence, or degrading humiliation tactics to punish what they alleged to be acts of anti-social behaviour in the community. Men and women were 'punished' by the PIRA for a variety of alleged crimes ranging from drug-dealing to petty theft or joyriding, to fraternising with the security services, or sexually abusing children. These attacks commonly involved the victim being either beaten, covered in tar and feathers, having their hair cut off, or being 'kneecapped' – a form of malicious wounding commonly inflicted via a low-velocity gunshot to the kneepit by a handgun, which can sometimes also include the attacking of the ankles or elbows.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Eamon Collins with Mick McGovern, *Killing Rage* (London, 1997), p.295.

¹⁰⁵ Mulholland, *Short Introduction*, p.65.

¹⁰⁶ R.J. Barr & R.A.B. Mollan, 'The orthopaedic consequences of civil disturbance in Northern Ireland', *The Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery*, British Volume, 71-B/5, (1989), pp.739-744.

Fatalities Attributed to PIRA 1969 – 1979

The PIRA are attributed with killing up to 1116 individuals between 1970 and 1979.¹⁰⁷ The dataset established for this thesis reveals that, in terms of the total volume of fatalities that can or could potentially be attributed to the PIRA between 1970 and 1979, security force personnel were the hardest hit by the armed struggle, followed by civilians, and a not insignificant proportion of the fatalities were members of the PIRA themselves. Some of the people represented in the data were individuals the PIRA killed because they were a category of person whom the organisation claimed was a legitimate target. Others were killed because, even though they do not fall comfortably within the PIRA's own definition of a legitimate target, the organisation seems to have maintained their definitions (security-force personnel or collaborators) with various degrees of elasticity.

There was also, however, a significant amount of PIRA violence that deviated from these principles. To be sure, the range of individuals who were proactively targeted by the PIRA also exceeded the categories the organisation defined as legitimate targets of assassination. The events in which these lives were lost are also varied. Some individuals were the victims of targeted assassination assaults, others were killed even though they had not been the intended target of a PIRA attack.

¹⁰⁷ Kowalski, *DPhil Dataset*.

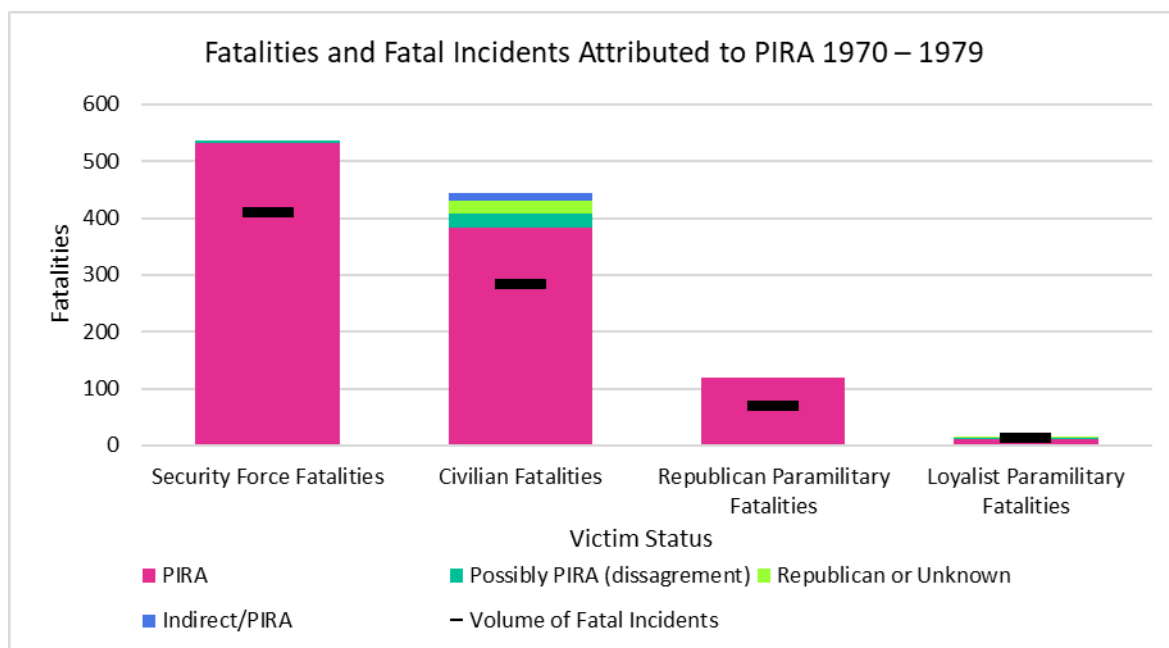


Figure 2.1 Fatalities and Fatal Incidents Attributed to PIRA 1970 – 1979.

Source: Kowalski, DPhil Dataset.

The evidence suggests that the PIRA killed 536 members of security-force personnel between 1970 and 1979 and may have been responsible for a further for four security-force fatalities in the same period. The 536 security force fatalities include: 327 from the British Armed Forces including reserves and cadets (318 British Army, five Royal Marines, one Territorial Army, one RAF Air cadet, two Army Cadet Force), 88 from the UDR (37 of whom were part-time members), 114 from the UK police and reserve police forces (one English metropolitan Police, 75 RUC, and 38 RUCR), and three from the security forces of the Republic of Ireland (one Irish Guard and two Garda Síochána).

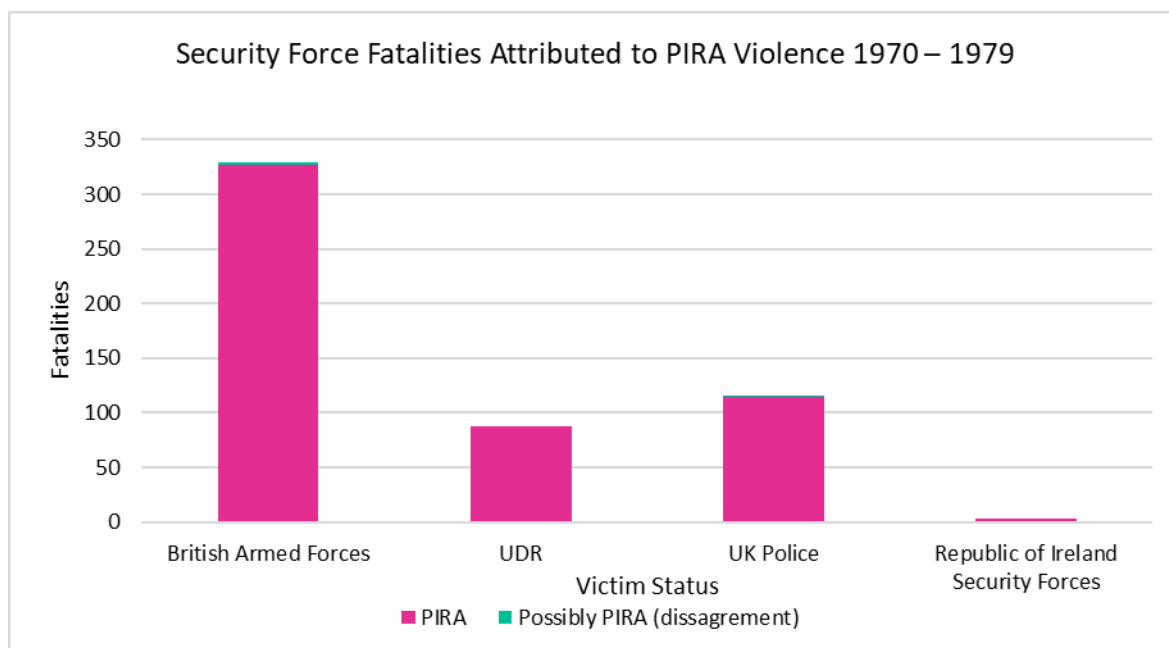


Figure 2.2 Security Force Fatalities Attributed to PIRA Violence 1970 – 1979.

Source: Kowalski, DPhil Dataset.

The vast majority of the security force personnel killed by the PIRA had been the intended target of the assassination attack that killed them. A small number of security force personnel – four British Army, one Territorial Army, and three RUC – were killed in attacks on property or during other incidents where they had not been the intended target of the attack which killed them and have, therefore, been coded as security force fatalities and ‘collateral damage’.¹⁰⁸ A further 3 individuals who held roles in the security forces were killed because of PIRA violence but have been categorised by the author as civilians and ‘collateral damage’ due to the circumstances of the events in which their lives were lost.¹⁰⁹ This is because, unlike their colleagues who were killed on-duty or were actively targeted by

¹⁰⁸ McKittrick, *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 185, 311-312, 441, 491-492, 701, 1490.

¹⁰⁹ Samuel Trainor died off-duty during the PIRA car bomb attack on Donegall Street in Central Belfast on 20 March 1972 (along with 4 civilians and 2 on-duty RUC officers) because the warnings issued by the PIRA were dangerously inadequate; Robert Gibson died off-duty during Bloody Friday 21 July 1972 (in addition to six civilians and two on-duty soldiers); and Gordon Crothers died off-duty at the La Mon Hotel and Restaurant fire bomb attack on 17 February 1979 (along with 11 civilians). See McKittrick, *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 315, 487, 2000.

the PIRA when they were off duty, these three individuals died during IED attacks that targeted commercial spaces that included bomb-warnings that had been insufficient to allow scope for civilians (including off-duty security-force personnel) to be evacuated from the vicinity. Individuals who resigned or retired from the security forces were not declared to be legitimate targets by the PIRA. However, there were 23 former members of the UK security forces that were killed between 1970 and 1979,¹¹⁰ and two former prison officers killed also.¹¹¹

In total, the evidence suggests that the PIRA killed 384 civilians between 1970 and 1979,¹¹² and have been potentially connected to a further 24 civilian fatalities (cases over which there is some disagreement in the sources). Of these, 118 (or 27%) were victims of targeted assassinations, 103 (or 23%) were victims of sectarian attacks, and 210 (or 47%) were not the intended or primary target of the attack that killed them (collateral damage). A further 13 civilians died because of heart attacks or vehicle collisions that have been attributed as indirect results of PIRA actions.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 212, 896, 945, 979, 1042, 1066, 1162, 1179, 1432, 1423, 1729, 1643, 1737, 1893, 1935, 1972, 1926, 2045, 2045, 2102, 2106, 2165, 2191.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, references: 2075, 1190.

¹¹² This figure includes the 3 off-duty members security force personnel that are being categorised as civilians/collateral damage, and the 23 former members of the security forces killed by PIRA (all described above).

¹¹³ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 80, 207, 543, A3, 971, 972, 1776, 1777, 1779, 1863, 1187, 174, 606.

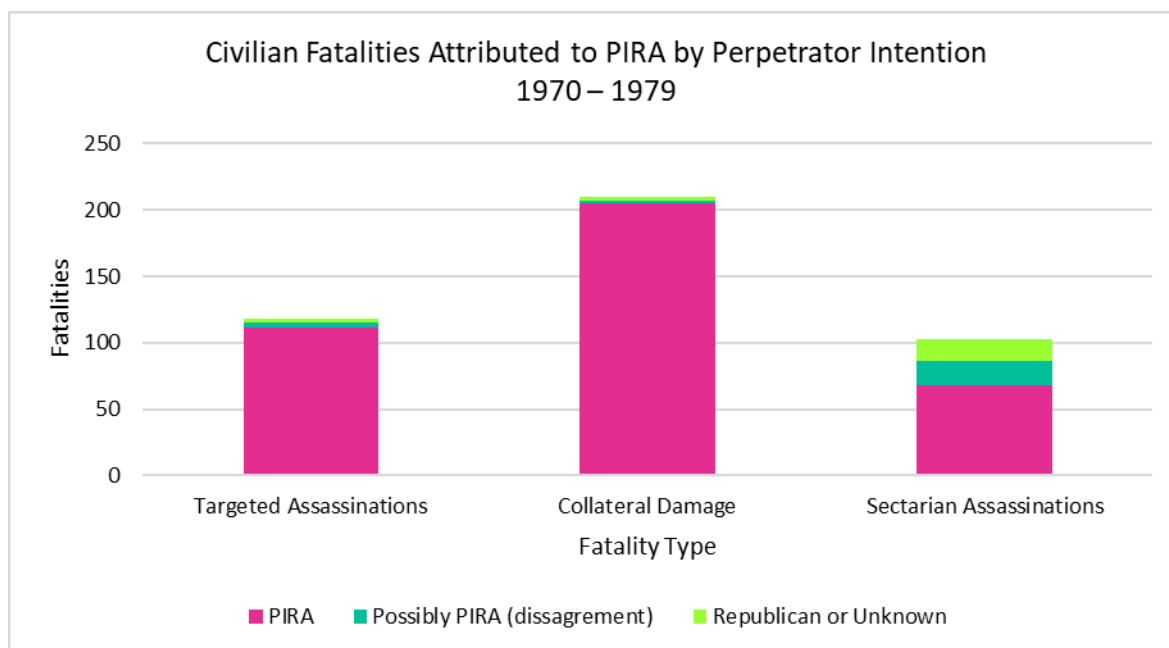


Figure 2.3 Civilian Fatalities Attributed to PIRA by Perpetrator Intention 1970 – 1979.

Source: Kowalski, DPhil Dataset.

The PIRA are believed to have killed fourteen loyalist paramilitaries during the 1970s in ten separate attacks,¹¹⁴ and there are two further assassinations of loyalists paramilitaries in 1975 which are believed to have been carried out by republican paramilitaries that it is possible could be connected to the PIRA or PIRA members.¹¹⁵ The PIRA killed ten members of rival republican paramilitary group OIRA in separate attacks, and a couple of civilians were assassinated during this period of feuding also.¹¹⁶

Most of the republican paramilitary fatalities that are attributed to the PIRA were the organisation's own members whose death was caused unintentionally as a result of

¹¹⁴ See for instance McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 440, 560, 742, 1408, 1494, 1633, 1639, 1705, 1725, 1817.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, references: 1337, 1373.

¹¹⁶ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 1425, 1507, 1510, 1512, 1515, 1517, 1519, 1520, 1953, 2172, 411, 1915.

mistakes made during the preparation or execution of their bombing and shooting attacks.

This phenomenon is sometimes coded in datasets as 'unintended self-destruction'.¹¹⁷

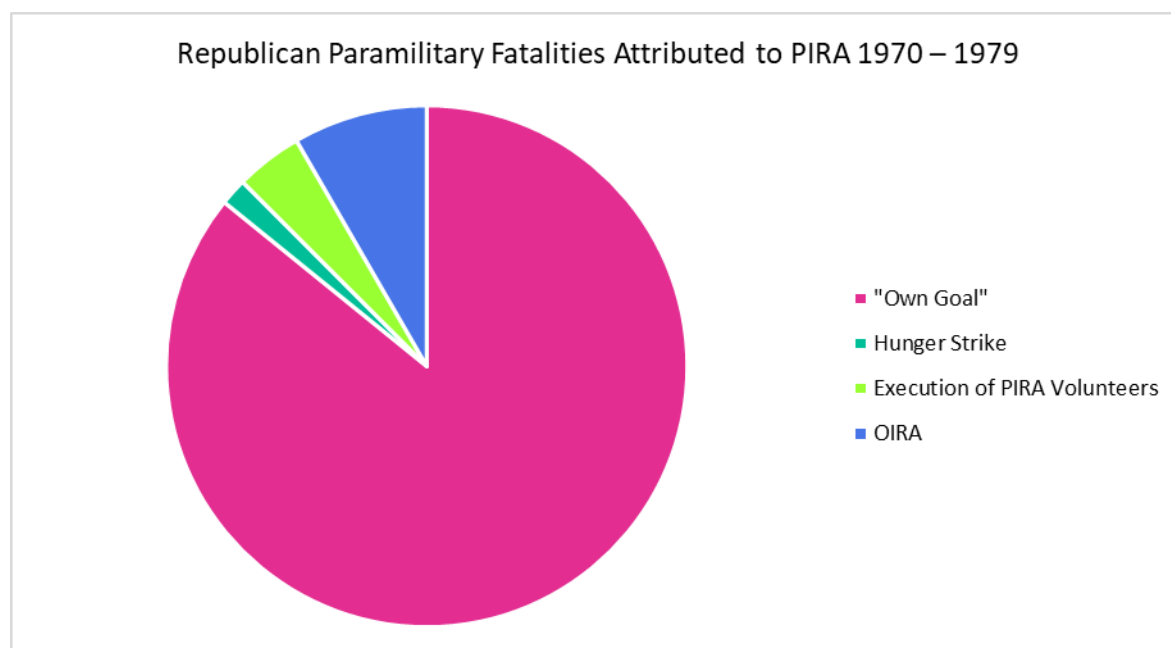


Figure 2.4 Republican Paramilitary Fatalities Attributed to PIRA 1970 – 1979.

Source: Kowalski, DPhil Dataset.

The same phenomenon is, however, commonly referred to in military accounts of the conflict as an 'own goal' which perhaps better encompasses the reality that in addition to causing their own deaths inadvertently, the PIRA could be responsible for accidentally killing their comrades.¹¹⁸ For example, seven PIRA volunteers were accidentally shot by other volunteers in this period,¹¹⁹ as well as one civilian who had been fighting alongside the PIRA

¹¹⁷ See for instance, Irish Information Partnership, *Agenda*.

¹¹⁸ For references to 'own goal' see for example, Patrick, *Fetch Felix*, p.77; Birchall, *The Longest Walk*, p.99; Styles, *Bombs Have No Pity*, p.98; Smith, *3-2-1 Bomb Gone*, p.32; Geraghty, *The Irish War*, p.53; Crawley, *The Yank*, p.80.

¹¹⁹ McKittrick, *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 109, 208, 233, 319, 354, 434, 1333.

during a gunfight in 1970.¹²⁰ This informal military terminology has been adopted in this thesis, for this reason.

Finally, the data also includes the deaths of two PIRA members who died while on hunger protest in 1974 and 1976.¹²¹ The medical cause of death of the PIRA hunger strikers was clear but the matter of who was responsible for their deaths was divisive matter.¹²²

Reconciling the Discrepancy Between PIRA Claims and PIRA Action?

What then, should we make of this discrepancy? Does the gap which seemingly exists between the PIRA's stated goals and methods, and the actual trajectory of their campaign signify that the PIRA failed? Or that their doctrine regarding the objectives and scope of their strategy was insincere? The literature regarding the PIRA and PIRA violence has included heated debates among scholars over precisely these questions.

There are those who, like James Dingley, have expressed distrust over the content of PIRA rhetoric (including interviews with former members, biographies, and autobiographies), the

¹²⁰ Henry McIlhone was shot by the PIRA in error during the gunfight known as the Battle for St Mathews in Belfast on 27 June 1970 and was included in the PIRA roll of honour for that reason. McKittrick, *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 32.

¹²¹ PIRA volunteers who died on hunger strike during the conflict include Michael Gaughan in 1974 (according to PIRA roll of Honour), Frank Stagg in 1976. 'Republican Roll of Honour'; McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 1139, 1620.

¹²² The inquest determined the cause of death for each of the ten men who died in the 1981 hunger strikes (7 were PIRA) as either 'Starvation – self-imposed' or 'Starvation – self-imposed with terminal bronchial pneumonia'. 'Coroner's Inquest relating to the deaths of Michael James Devine, Kieran Gerard Doherty, Francis James Sean Hughes, Edward Martin, Kevin Martin Lynch, Raymond Peter McCreesh, Joseph Francis McDonnell, Thomas Gerard McIlwee, Joseph Patrick O'Hara, and Robert Gerard Sands', 1 December 1981, PRONI, DOW/6/1/1/58/27A.

ability of historians to assess it impartially, or the value of oral history as a source with which to study the Troubles and its participants more broadly. Dingley concludes that the PIRA's claimed position regarding the non-targeting of civilians and non-sectarian targeting bias should be interpreted in one of two ways: as false statements intended to mask their true sectarian intentions,¹²³ or as delusional:

I can well believe that republicans do not regard themselves as sectarian, that is part of the problem – they often do not realize their own sectarian nature. They probably do not see blowing up Protestant businesses as sectarian; constitutional nationalists tend to.¹²⁴

Dingley criticises the work of others, for in his view, 'merely accepting, uncritically' the PIRA and Sinn Féin's explanation of their motives and means. The consequence of their (allegedly) having done so, according to Dingley's response to Robert White's 1997 article on the role of sectarianism in the PIRA campaign, is that their work has 'ended up sounding like an apologia for them' – an unwarranted claim that is repeated several times throughout the piece.¹²⁵

The most recent scholarship that critically engages with PIRA rhetoric and oral history records (among other sources) has presented a more nuanced explanation for the discrepancy between claimed PIRA policy and actual PIRA practice that involves assessing both PIRA rhetoric and PIRA actions within the context of political negotiation. Niall Ó Dochartaigh's work on the political negotiations between paramilitary groups and political

¹²³ James Dingley 'A reply to white's non-sectarian thesis of PIRA targeting', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 10/2, (1998), p.108.

¹²⁴ Dingley, 'A Reply', p.109.

¹²⁵ Ibid.; Robert W. White, 'The Irish Republican Army: An Assessment of Sectarianism', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 9/1 (1997), pp.20-55.

parties throughout the conflict reveals, for instance, that the political changes or concessions sought by the insurgent groups can change over time and that, for several reasons, the position held by the actor, can be far more nuanced, and contain a far greater degree of flexibility than their axiomatic political rhetoric suggests:

it is not possible to accurately read the solution minimally acceptable to republicans from their stated position any more than one can read that of any other party to a negotiation from public statements.¹²⁶

Ó Dochartaigh explains that this is, firstly, because the party may be unwilling to publicly adopt a conciliatory position in case this conveys a sense of weakness to their opponent that might deter them from offering concessions, agreeing to a negotiated settlement, or even entertaining the idea of discussing the prospect of either.¹²⁷ Secondly, it is a common negotiating tactic for a party or organisation to publicly rule out compromise so that they can claim that they are unable, not just unwilling, to give ground in this regard.¹²⁸ And finally, parties to negotiation will naturally guard information about their negotiation strategy and position, especially their bottom line, or point below which the organisation would be unwilling to make an agreement, which is known in the negotiation literature as the *resistance point*, for 'It is simply bad negotiating practice to let it be known how much you are willing to concede'.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Ó Dochartaigh, *Deniable Contact*, p.46.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Niall Ó Dochartaigh, 'The Longest Negotiation: British Policy, IRA Strategy and the Making of the Northern Ireland Peace Settlement', *Political Studies*, 63/1, (2015), pp.202-203.

When we read the PIRA's statements within the context of a political negotiation, as Ó Dochartaigh does, we can better understand the major strategic-level inconsistencies over matters including the giving up of the policy of political abstention, and the ending of the armed struggle. Richard English echoes this sentiment in his 2016 book, *Does Terrorism Work?: A History*:

it is an oversimplification to assess the PIRA campaign as wholly unsuccessful on the basis that their central (claimed) strategic aims remained unfilled at the end of their campaign.¹³⁰

Richard English sets out a tiered framework for understanding instead, the different kind of outcomes that can occur, each of which can align more closely with what the leadership feel is desirable or actually possible to obtain over time.¹³¹ In English's assessment, political violence can result in the achievement of total strategic victory, partial strategic victory (defined as including for example – the partial achievement of primary goals, the achievement of secondary goals, or the obstruction of opponents goals), tactical success (such as operational success, the securing of interim concessions, acquisition of publicity or other organisational strengthening), or the attainment of other inherent rewards of struggle (such as prestige and status or an augmented sense of individual or group identity or pride).¹³² In this sense we can see that, even though PIRA rhetoric regularly expressed a determined sense of commitment to the core republican principles of national liberation, self-determination, and sovereignty, this is not to say, that this was the actual or unchanging political position of the PIRA leadership over time.

¹³⁰ English, *Does Terrorism Work?*, p.145.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p.30.

¹³² *Ibid.*, pp.30-38.

Political negotiations and the eventual end of the conflict are outside the scope of this thesis, but the framework of assessment adopted by Ó Dochartaigh and English has wider relevance for and actual application in this work. This is because it reminds us to frame the overarching strategy of political violence as coercion, and give due consideration, therefore, to understanding how the pressures associated with the PIRA's endeavours to exert influence over certain stakeholders, affected their tactical-level choices including the targets and tactics they selected, and what they were willing or unwilling to claim responsibility for afterwards.

Strategy and Audiences

Louise Richardson explores the motivations and logic of practitioners of political violence in *What Terrorists Want* (2007).¹³³ In this rich comparative study Richardson makes a clear distinction between what she terms the primary and secondary objectives of terrorists.

Primary objectives are long-term political objectives that require significant political change:

Ethnonationalist groups are looking for traditional territorial gains, such as independence and secession. (Examples include the PLO in Palestine, the PKK in Turkey, the LTTE in Sri Lanka, and the IRA and ETA in Europe). Social revolutionary groups are seeking to overthrow capitalism. (Examples include the Red Brigades in Italy, the RAF in Germany, Action Directe in France, and the CCC in Belgium). Maoist groups – such as the Shining Path in Peru and the Communist Party of Nepal – seek to remake society. Some religious sects, such as Aum Shinrikyo in Japan, seek to bring about the millennium; fundamentalist groups seek to replace secular law with religious law. Some movements, such as Hamas and Hezbollah appear to be hybrids, and some groups evolve from one kind to another like the transformation of the isolated “old” IRA to the pragmatic and broader-based Provisional IRA. In every instance, they are driven by an ideal.¹³⁴

¹³³ Louise Richardson, *What Terrorists Want: Understanding the Enemy, Containing the Threat* (New York, 2007), pp.75-76.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

Secondary objectives are short-term and more immediate by contrast. In Richardson's account secondary objectives are the intended outcome of specific acts. They include exacting revenge, generating publicity, achieving specific concessions, causing disorder, or provoking repression. Moreover, Richardson finds that the secondary objectives of terrorists can be subsumed under three motivations – to take revenge, acquire renown, or elicit a reaction.¹³⁵ The acts that are perpetrated in the pursuit of these secondary objectives are expected (by the perpetrator) to contribute towards the eventual attainment of the group's primary objectives, or are necessary more immediately to reinforce organisational dynamics.¹³⁶ In this sense, secondary objectives can explain why a perpetrator like the PIRA selects certain targets.

The PIRA did not have the material resources necessary to achieve their aims by sheer brute force because they were quite simply the weaker party to the asymmetric conflict.¹³⁷ However, wars fought for limited (as opposed to existential) political objectives do not require conventional military victory: belligerents do not need to overwhelm enemy forces or take and hold ground, they only need to apply sufficient pressure to force their opponents to yield.

¹³⁵ Richardson contends that the primary objectives (philosophical or political aspirations) are generally 'of greater interest to the leadership of the movements, while followers are more attracted by the nearer-term appeal of revenge, renown, and reaction. Ibid., p.81.

¹³⁶ Ibid., pp.76-81, 88-103.

¹³⁷ Stephen Biddle, *Nonstate Warfare: the military methods of guerrillas, warlords, and militias* (Princeton, 2021), pp.31-33.

The PIRA's campaign of political violence was intended to apply sufficient pressure upon British policymakers to force them to agree to their demands by raising the cost of ignoring or denying them. Practically speaking, the PIRA's bombs and bullets were intended to kill targeted peoples or cause material damage to infrastructure. In a wider sense, however, each attack was intended to contribute to the eventual attainment of their longer-term goals by placing a financial or reputational burden upon the government. The PIRA's hope was that the accumulated burden of costs they produced would eventually become intolerable.

Former Chief of Staff Seán Mac Stiofáin explained that the PIRA intended their activities would have a snowballing affect.¹³⁸ The logic was simple: as the volume of shooting and bombing activity in the region escalated, it would become necessary for the government to extend the security force response which would be costly to maintain. The strength of each branch of the security forces in Northern Ireland, as measured by the number of personnel that were employed in the region, grew over time and was a significant expense. The RUC, for example, had approximately 3,000 staff in December 1969 but had more than double this number by the end of the next decade. The RUCR had barely over 600 members by the end of 1970 but grew to over 4500 full and part-time members by the end of 1979. The number of military personnel stationed in Northern Ireland grew from less than 3,000 in June of 1969 to around 15,000 by the end of the 1970s. Likewise, the UDR went from 4,000 strong at the end of 1970 to having the best part of 8,000 members by the end of 1979.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Mac Stiofáin, *Memoirs*, pp.206-207.

¹³⁹ 'Security Statistics: 1969-1987', as of 09 November 1987, included in RC Masfield, P/S Secretary of State, 'Preparation of Material for the Statement on the Enniskillen Bombing', 09 November 1987, TNA, CJ 4/6872; 'Northern Ireland Regular Army Strength', Barzilay, *Volume 4*, pp.238-239; Table NI-SEC-01: Strength (number)

The Northern Ireland Office estimated that the annual cost of deploying the army in Northern Ireland rose annually in this decade from £1.5m in 1969, to £45m in 1975 and £96m in 1979.¹⁴⁰

The statements that were issued by the PIRA in the aftermath of a fatal assault on military or police personnel show that they expected these attacks to erode morale within these companies.¹⁴¹ Following the fatal car-bomb attack the PIRA launched against off-duty soldier Private Richard Biddle on 8 April 1983 it was announced, for instance, that: 'We are out to make the garrison town of Omagh completely unsafe for British Army personnel'.¹⁴² The death of a soldier or police officer could also have significant financial implications for the British government, if a successful compensation claim was put to them by the bereaved relatives of the victim. The direct link between PIRA activity and this financial burden is clear, for instance, when compensation was issued to the families of those who were killed by them. This was the case, for example, when £10,000 was awarded to the family of a soldier killed in a PIRA landmine ambush on 10 February 1972,¹⁴³ £24,000 was awarded to the relatives of a bomb-disposal expert killed by a PIRA car bomb on 29 May 1972,¹⁴⁴ and £34,000 was awarded to the family of a soldier killed by a command-wire IED planted by the PIRA in a derelict cottage on 20 July 1973.¹⁴⁵

of the RUC / PSNI, and the UDR / RIR, 1938, 1971 to 2010-11', <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/ni/security.htm>, (18-12-2021); 'Table NI-SEC-03: British Army Personnel (number) in Northern Ireland, 1969 to 2005 (incomplete)': <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/ni/security.htm>, (18/12/2021).

¹⁴⁰ Mr Scott, 12 May 1987, Hansard, vol. 116, col. 179, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1987-05-12/debates/2d810d3e-02dc-499c-a5eb-0c806edd3a29/Terrorism>, (13/05/2022).

¹⁴¹ Smith, *Fighting*, p.8.

¹⁴² Quoted in McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 2530.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, reference: 267.

¹⁴⁴ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 325.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, reference: 902.

A dossier compiled by the law-and-order Division of the Northern Ireland office in 1987 provides insight into the scale of the costs in this regard. It was estimated that 20% of all payments issued under the criminal injuries compensation scheme, and 80% of those issued under the criminal damage compensation scheme arose from the security situation in Northern Ireland, and that the total cost of these claims was more than £30m annually in 1977, 1978 and 1979.¹⁴⁶ A Foreign Office report that was prepared ahead of the August 1994 PIRA ceasefire gives some indication as to the sum cost of the conflict. It was estimated that the cumulative financial cost of the violence to both the Irish and UK government since 1969 was approximately £20 billion, and that annual security costs were £200 million per annum at that time.¹⁴⁷ It was also estimated that 46,000 jobs had been lost in Northern Ireland between 1973 and 1990 because the conflict had deterred foreign companies from investing in the country.¹⁴⁸

The PIRA could make their strategy sound simple. Former chief of staff Seán Mac Stiofáin claimed the plan was to incrementally increase the scale and scope of their operations – “escalate, escalate, escalate”¹⁴⁹ – and to continue fighting until their goals were achieved: ‘More soldiers go back in coffins [until] the pressure [compels] the government to [do the] right thing about Ireland.’¹⁵⁰ PIRA strategy was, however, necessarily more complex than

¹⁴⁶ David Hill, ‘Law and Order Division to Mr A W Stephens and PS/ Secretary of State’, 27 July 1987, in ‘The Cost of Violence 1977 – 1987’, PRONI, NIO/14/19A.

¹⁴⁷ Harry McGee, ‘Troubles were costing Irish taxpayer “up to three times more than British counterpart”’, *Irish Times*, 29 December 2021, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/troubles-were-costing-irish-taxpayer-up-to-three-times-more-than-british-counterpart-1.4761056>, (13/09/2022).

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ John Lloyd, ‘Bloody Sunday demands an act of atonement’, *Financial Times*, 15 June 2010, <https://www.ft.com/content/b0facd80-78b6-11df-a312-00144feabdc0>, (22/07/2022).

¹⁵⁰ ‘Interview with Seán MacStiofáin’, conducted by Peter Taylor for *Behind the Mask: The IRA and Sinn Féin*, Public Broadcasting Service, (TV series, 1997), Frontline Show #1603, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/ira/inside/mac.html>, (28/04/2020).

military escalation. To be sure, the strategy of any paramilitary group, the PIRA included, will need to balance action with restraint if it has any chance of generating a situation whereby the stake at issue in the conflict is perceived, by their opponent, to be sufficiently outweighed by the costs as to consider conceding to (all or some) of their demands.

The PIRA's public rhetoric also tended to frame the success of the armed struggle as wholly contingent upon their ability to apply pressure to British policy makers: 'the British Government...holds the key to peace and war'.¹⁵¹ It is clear, however, that this was by no means the case. Military agitation can only influence policy makers to the extent that it influences local, regional, or global opinion.¹⁵² For this reason, we know that the electorate of Great Britain and Northern Ireland was a critically important audience to the armed struggle. The extent to which the PIRA could exert influence over their audience(s) depended on the way in which their actions were perceived. For this reason, the PIRA needed to consider how to apply violence selectively and maintain a strategic campaign of public relations (or propaganda). Otherwise, they might find that the public discontent they caused resulted in demand for the cessation of their own activities more than it did produce calls for British withdrawal.

In the comparative study of campaigns of political violence *Rules for Rebels* (2018), Max Abrahms concludes that 'that militant groups are far more likely to achieve their political demands when violence is directed against military targets rather than civilian ones.'¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ 'Dáithí Ó Conaill Television Interview', An Phoblacht/Republican News, 30 November 1974.

¹⁵² Biddle, *Nonstate Warfare*, p.2.

¹⁵³ Abrahms, *Rules for Rebels*, pp.10-11, 86-95.

This, Abrahms argues is because civilian attacks lower the prospects of government concessions being granted, and the chances of organisational survival for the groups that perpetrate them in the long term. Abrahms argues that militant leaders would be smart to adopt three rules in this regard. First, they should adopt a policy of refraining from selecting civilian targets. Second they should ensure that they wield influence over their members and maintain effective control over their actions to minimise the likelihood of their sabotaging the organisations cause by either intentionally targeting civilians, or causing civilian fatalities in the process of striking other targets with indiscriminate tactics (collateral damage). ¹⁵⁴ And finally, the leadership should issue statements that actively distance the organization from terrorism when operatives perpetrate it by denying organisation involvement – actively or passively – or when this is not plausible, denying the principle of intent. ¹⁵⁵

Abrahms work is pertinent to understanding how and why the PIRA managed their campaign of targeted assassinations against civilians (alleged collaborators and victims of sectarian assassination attacks discussed in subsequent sections). It also explains why there is incentive for organisations like the PIRA to avoid causing collateral damage, or reasons for them to attempt to address its occurrence with public statements of apology or denial.

Cato Hemmingby and Tore Bjørgo's study of the Anders Behring Breivik corroborates Richardson and Abraham's findings. Their work revealed that targets that are considered to

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p.11; 119-120.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., pp.11-12, 169-178, 191-190.

hold high symbolic value to the perpetrator will be attractive, that 'discrimination' can take many forms, and compromises are often made in the face of challenges or setbacks. For example, even though Breivik planned to target civilians, he was keen to avoid killing children or appearing to be a child-killer. However, Breivik was ultimately willing to kill a large number of youths when it became apparent to him that the average age of the delegate at the event he targeted was younger than he had expected (33 of those he killed were under 18).¹⁵⁶

The case study material examined in part I will demonstrate that there is a wealth of evidence to suggest that the PIRA's actions and statements were designed with public opinion in mind. These include endeavouring to balancing action with restraint, moving away from target and tactic choices that were found to cause intense public outrage, denying or concealing highly controversial actions, or attempting to reframe the narrative of the armed struggle retrospectively to provide a more favourable or triumphant account. The case study material also reveals that there are several reasons why the PIRA's endeavour to adapt the armed struggle to the political conditions was further complicated. The obstacles to the PIRA's endeavours to take revenge, acquire renown, or elicit a reaction will be outlined briefly now for context before the case studies are examined.

¹⁵⁶ Hemmingby and Bjørge, *The Dynamics*, p.34.

Obstacles

This thesis argues that the PIRA's ability to exert influence over public opinion was critically impaired by the fact that they did not have widely accepted political mandate to apply violence. Just War Theory is a helpful tool for explaining why this was a critical obstacle to strategic success.¹⁵⁷ *Jus ad Bellum*, the right to fight, and *Jus in Bello*, the legitimate way in which war should be fought, denote when and how violence can be perpetrated; to correct a grave and certain suffered wrong, as a last resort, and in a manner that is discriminate, proportionate and effective.

An ethical framework for perpetrating guerrilla warfare in a manner which adheres to the standards of Just War Theory has been developed by Professor Michael Gross. In his 2015 Book, *The Ethics of Insurgency*, Gross argues that there is scope to define some acts of political violence as 'just', when anchored on the right to political self-determination and dignified existence and subject to the conditions of being a last resort, proportionate, and effective.¹⁵⁸ Crucially, both *Jus ad Bellum* and *Jus in Bello* must be adhered to. According to Gross, a 'just' Guerrilla war must be waged in the name of a valid cause.¹⁵⁹ This could be, for example, to overthrow an exploitative authoritarian government that is enacting unjust policies ranging from genocide to vast economic inequality, discrimination, and deprivation. Specifically, Gross determines that a 'just cause' must equate to a shift away from an undignified existence that was not possible to challenge by non-violent means.¹⁶⁰ The

¹⁵⁷ E., Gentry, 'Epistemic Bias', in C.E., Gentry, and A.E., Eckert, (ed.s), *The future of Just War*, (London, 2014), p.19.

¹⁵⁸ Michael Gross, *The Ethics of Insurgency: A Critical Guide to Just Guerrilla Warfare*, (New York, 2015), p.23.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, pp.37-44.

methods of just guerrilla warfare employed must also be discriminate, proportionate, and effective. This means that the strategy must not cost more lives than it saves, have a reasonable chance of success, discriminate effectively between legitimate targets and innocent victims, and cause only a limited amount of collateral damage.

Gross does not suggest that the campaign waged by any insurgent movement hitherto has equated to *ethical guerrilla warfare*; nor necessarily even aspired to. Rather, Gross seeks to provide a framework for the discussion of guerrilla warfare as having the *capacity* to be conducted in a manner not indifferent to inter-state warfare, and as such, held to the same moral standards. The thesis is concerned solely with understanding and explaining the forces which affected the form of PIRA violence; not assessing whether the PIRA met the standards of just war theory.¹⁶¹ The frameworks of assessment adopted by scholars of ethics and moral philosophy are useful to this inquiry nevertheless because they draw our attention to the key components that underpin perceptions of campaigns of violence, both in and outside of academia: the motive and means of the perpetrator.

While the PIRA did not explicitly refer to the concept of *Jus ad Bellum*, they publicise their reasons for using violence. The academic literature does not support these claims. Moral Philosopher Timothy Shanahan, for example, argues that whilst some of the causes the PIRA stood for may have warranted resistance, their armed struggle for the most part did not equate to 'just war' because it was not a last resort because there were democratic political

¹⁶¹ Timothy Shanahan, *The Provisional Irish Republican Army and the Morality of Terrorism*, (Edinburgh, 2009).

routes available.¹⁶² This meant that the PIRA's claims regarding the justifications for their armed struggle or legitimacy of selecting certain targets were less likely to be widely perceived as credible.

The PIRA did not claim to be actively moderating their military conduct in line with the just war principles of *Jus in Bello*; but they had incentives to strive towards these standards, nevertheless. The PIRA needed to apply violence in a manner that was accurate and effective if they were to inflict the fatalities or cause the material damage they intended – the PIRA was unlikely to bring about their desired political end-goals if their bombing and shooting operations were off-target, stillborn or thwarted by the security forces. The PIRA also had incentive to apply violence in a manner that discriminated between targets and non-targets because failure to demonstrate they had the ability and willingness to abide by the laws of armed conflict was anathema to their quest to be seen as a viable state-like political authority.¹⁶³ Moreover, the armed struggle was also unlikely to succeed politically if it resulted in outcomes that were highly unpalatable to their audiences including civilian casualties.

Ron Dundai found that former PIRA members they interviewed for their research demonstrated a sense of pride and confidence when describing their state-like legal procedures:

The pride and confidence with which IRA members describe their state-like legal procedures is evident. As an ex-combatant said: 'The IRA did attempt to conform to the laws of war where possible. They had a very clear picture of what was allowed

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Dundai, *Penalty in the Underground*, pp.97-98.

and wasn't allowed, they had structure which was in place, of leadership and directions and strategy and policy, they had a code of IRA army orders, code of behaviour.'¹⁶⁴

However, it is also clear that there was internal and external pressure for the PIRA to engage in activity that transgressed the laws of armed conflict or select targets that were outside of categories of person that the organisation labelled legitimate targets. The case study material below demonstrates that local pressures could compel the PIRA to take actions against civilians (including punishment violence, or sectarian assassinations), and occasions when the PIRA was willing to take exceptional actions against civilians to demonstrate their authority (including the assassination of so-called collaborators).

Victims of conflict that are killed despite not having been the primary target of the military operation or violent assault which killed them, are commonly referred to in the literature as collateral damage.¹⁶⁵ Collateral damage is an ill-defined category which causes unease – or offence – among both scholars of violence and those bereaved by it because it is often perceived to be a casual or dismissive term; or implying some diminution of culpability on behalf of the perpetrator(s). The contention of this thesis, however, that the term collateral damage is unsatisfactory principally because it fails to explain the diverse ways in which it can and does occur or provide scope to differentiate between them. The

¹⁶⁴ Dundai, *Penalty in the Underground*, p.98.

¹⁶⁵ See for instance: Adil Ahmad Haque, 'Killing with Discrimination', in Saba Bazagan-Forward and Samuel C. Reckless (eds.), *The Ethics of War: Essays* (Oxford, 2017), pp. 164-181; Jack Macdonald, *Enemies Known and Unknown* (London, 2017), pp.202-203.

most difficult problem concerns the extent to which the outcome of an operation could be described as having been foreseeable.

This argument will be explained in full in part III of the thesis and supported by the case studies that are presented within it. Before then, media representations of collateral damage and PIRA responses to this will be examined in this part of the thesis, and the material factors that can cause it to occur (including weapons) will be examined in part II. However, at this stage it is pertinent to note that as an amateur and clandestine organisation that was the weaker party to an asymmetric conflict, the PIRA was prone to the kinds of organisational and operational dysfunction that can (and did) result in collateral damage being caused, that incidents of it were widely covered in the media and attracted intense criticism of the PIRA, and that the tragic outcome was politically detrimental to the PIRA.

The literature on cognitive bias suggests that the PIRA's ability to foster a certain degree of support for their campaign would have been impeded by the disproportionate volume of media attention that was dedicated to the most shocking or egregious acts of violence they perpetrated. Work by Daniel Kahneman or Lieve Van Woensel on availability bias, is highly pertinent in this regard.¹⁶⁶ Their research suggests that we are more likely to jump to conclusions and base our reasoning on little evidence than we might have realised.

¹⁶⁶ Kahneman, *Thinking*; Van Woensel, *A Bias Radar*.

In *Thinking Fast and Slow* (2012) Kahnemen explains that intensity matching and associative coherence, among other operative features, make us prone to cognitive illusions such as ‘anchoring, nonprogressive predictions, overconfidence, and numerous others.’¹⁶⁷

Research regarding the availability heuristic in particular matters to the subject of this thesis because it explains why some issues are highly salient in the public mind:

People tend to assess the relative importance of issues by the ease with which they are retrieved from memory – and this is largely determined by the extent of coverage in the media. Frequently mentioned topics populate the mind even as others slip away from awareness.¹⁶⁸

If the relative importance of issues is assessed by the ease with which it is retrieved from memory, those which have flooded our consciousness because they have received wide coverage in the media will be favoured.¹⁶⁹ This explains why civilian-centric terrorist tactics have been potent in other contexts.

Our assessment of rare events is especially impacted. Civil-centric terrorism works and is effective because it produces ‘an availability cascade’. Information about the event is highly accessible – images flood the media. And the subject is highly emotive – the death of civilians.¹⁷⁰

It also implies that the cases of PIRA violence that received the most media coverage had a disproportionate influence over the way in which the armed struggle was perceived. The consequence of this for the PIRA specifically was that the behaviours they exhibited on rare occasions became conflated with perceptions of their wider activity. Likewise, nodal events became synonymous with the interpretations of the sum of the armed struggle.

¹⁶⁷ Kahneman, *Thinking*, pp.8, 417.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.8.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.7-8.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.321-333.

Finally, the challenge of adapting the armed struggle to accommodate the political conditions was far more complicated than a binary relationship between action and audience because, despite what the PIRA may have claimed, there were multiple stakeholders to any contest – political, military or paramilitary – over Northern Ireland that collectively held diametrically opposed and seemingly unreconcilable positions. What is more, each of these stakeholders, including the PIRA, could be internally divided over matters of policy and practice. The historical background to the violent conflict that was fought from 1969 is pertinent to explaining the reasons why this was the case.

According to the 1973 PIRA publication, *Freedom Struggle*, the ‘complete background’ to the conflict begins in 1169 with the first Anglo-Norman invasions of the island of Ireland.¹⁷¹ While there is insufficient space here to reproduce Brendan O’Leary’s three-volume treatise on the history of Northern Ireland, it is at the very least helpful by way of an introduction to highlight some of the most pertinent legal, political and demographic shifts that occurred prior to the outbreak of violence in 1969.¹⁷²

English involvement in Ireland and the associated movement of peoples can indeed be traced back to the twelfth century. Previously, Gaelic Ireland had comprised the whole island. But the Norman invasion in 1169 resulted in a partial conquest of the island and marked the beginning of more than 800 years of English political and military involvement. By the seventeenth century, the island of Ireland had been conquered, colonised, and

¹⁷¹ ‘P. Ó Néill’, *Freedom Struggle by the Provisional IRA* (Irish Republican Publicity Bureau, 1973).

¹⁷² O’Leary, *A Treatise: Volume I*; O’Leary, *A Treatise: Volume II*; O’Leary, *A Treatise: Volume III*.

planted with communities adhering to different forms of Protestantism.¹⁷³ Discriminatory laws and practices were introduced that disadvantaged the indigenous Catholic majority population, and generated lasting polarisation between Catholic Ireland, the Protestant state, and the settler population.

The systemic inequality that anti-Catholic discrimination produced, inspired Irish nationalist liberation efforts to secure parliamentary reform and greater Irish autonomy from Britain through both peaceful protests and violent rebellions from the late 18th century onwards.¹⁷⁴ Several, ultimately unsuccessful uprisings were fought in the years that followed including: the United Irishmen-led rebellions of 1798 and 1803; an attempted uprising in 1848 by the Young Ireland movement; and the 1867 Fenian uprising led by the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB).

These uprisings were a clear indication that the inhabitants of Ireland were divided over the national question. Religious denomination – Catholic or Protestant – was (and remains) a useful, if imperfect, way to demarcate the boundary between the divided communities: adult Protestants were almost invariably unionist in political persuasion, believing that Ireland should remain in union with Great Britain, whereas adult Catholics were mostly, but not invariably, nationalist in their politics, believing the island should become a sovereign, independent republic.¹⁷⁵ It is also a clear indication of how and why this intractable clash,

¹⁷³ O'Leary, *A Treatise: Volume I*, pp.9-10.

¹⁷⁴ White, 'An Assessment', pp.22-28.

¹⁷⁵ For religion, political allegiance, and voting patterns see Brian Mercer Walker, *Ulster Politics: The Formative Years* (Belfast, 1989), pp. 255-67; Richard Rose, *Governing without Consensus: An Irish Perspective* (London, 1971), pp. 235-36; John Coakley, 'Religion, National Identity and Political Change in Modern Ireland', *Irish Political Studies*, 17/1, (2002), pp. 4-28.

over which many lives were lost in the twentieth century, has roots in the colonialism and religious reformation of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the protests, uprisings, and guerrilla warfare that subsequently emerged are not well described as religious conflict.¹⁷⁶ For by this point Protestants and Catholics were divided by differences in economic and political power, national and political identity, and historical experience.¹⁷⁷

By the time that devolved government (or Home Rule) was being demanded (and considered under the Government of Ireland Bills of 1886, 1893, and 1912) there was a significant minority of Protestant inhabitants in Ireland which meant that, even though some 80 per cent of the population was Catholic, it was not going to be possible to simply to ignore their wishes.¹⁷⁸ Eventually it was decided that, in order to accommodate the fact that Irish nationalist rejection of the metropole was wholly incompatible with Unionists' desire to remain part of the United Kingdom, it was necessary to include provision for the (temporary) exclusion of part of Ulster from the imposition of devolved government (Home Rule) in Ireland. But Home Rule was not implemented, nor Ulster partially sectioned from the rest of Ireland in 1914 under the Government of Ireland Act (1914) as expected. Rather, the question of Home Rule was postponed initially due to the outbreak of the First World War (under the Suspensory Act, 1914), and delayed further when violent conflict broke out in the region (the Irish War of Independence, 1919-21).

¹⁷⁶ For the dissatisfaction of scholars with the depiction of the Troubles as a war of religion and the emergence of the terminology of 'ethnic conflict' see Ian McBride, 'Ethnicity and Conflict: The Northern Ireland Troubles', forthcoming.

¹⁷⁷ McGarry and O'Leary, *Explaining Northern Ireland*, p.212.

¹⁷⁸ Mulholland, *Short Introduction*, p.14.

Finally, the 1914 Government of Ireland Act was superseded by a fourth Home Rule Bill, passed as the Government of Ireland Act 1920, that was implemented in 1921. This bill would partition the Island of Ireland into two separate self-governing polities: what is now known as the Republic of Ireland, consisting of the 26 south-westerly counties and with an overwhelmingly Roman Catholic majority population, and the smaller Northern Ireland, made up of the six north-easterly counties, which remained part of the United Kingdom and which has consistently maintained a demographic status quo of approximately a two-thirds Protestant majority population to a one-third Catholic minority from partition until the outbreak of conflict in 1969.¹⁷⁹

Partition did not resolve the contention which existed between the divided inhabitants of the Island of Ireland. Rather, the partition of Ireland generated new fissures over the national question on each side of the debate, as nationalists and unionists became divided on new questions: the legitimacy of the border and the justification of contesting it by force; and, for nationalists, whether abstention from constitutional politics should be forgone to make progress towards achieving their end goal of a united Ireland. This is evident in the continuation of violent conflict in the region throughout the twentieth century, including further efforts to attain total Irish independence (the Irish War of Independence, 1919-1921); the outbreak of civil war that followed the partition of Ireland (the Irish Civil War,

¹⁷⁹ Thanks, in part, to negligible volumes of inter-marriage, and the counterbalancing of effect of Catholic emigration against the elevated rate of births in the Catholic community. Desmond A. Gillmor, 'Changing religions in the Republic of Ireland, 1991-2002', *Irish Geography*, 39/2, (2006), pp.111-128; Table 'NI-REL-02: Catholic population in Northern Ireland', <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/ni/popul.htm>, (17/06/2020); Paul A. Compton, 'The Demographic Dimension of Integration and Division in Northern Ireland', in F. W. Boal and J. N. H. Douglas (eds.), *Integration and Division: Geographical Perspectives on the Northern Ireland Problem* (London, 1982), pp. 75-105.

1922-1923); and the waging of three, ultimately unsuccessful, armed campaigns by the paramilitary organisation known as the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in the years preceding the outbreak of the Troubles (the British Campaign of 1939, the Northern Campaign of 1942–1944 and the Border Campaign of 1956–1962).¹⁸⁰

Partition exacerbated the inequality that aggrieved the Irish Catholics of Northern Ireland. The Catholic minority population of Northern Ireland faced discrimination on many fronts, including the allocation of housing and employment opportunities. By the late 1960s, divergence over matters of identity, governance and self-determination had, consequently, manifested as sustained violent and non-violent confrontation in the region.¹⁸¹ At which point highly divergent (and changing) positions were held over the union, by the leadership and wider membership of each political party that took seats (or abstained from them) in Westminster, Stormont and Leinster House, among their respective electorates (the public of Britain, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland), and across the various police, military, and paramilitary organisations that were engaged in pro- or anti-state insurgent or counterinsurgent initiatives in and over their jurisdictions. As such, it was inherently difficult for the PIRA to determine a line of action that would be broadly unoffensive, yet alone actually satisfactory to a wide proportion of the populace.

These political conditions were challenging, in and of themselves, and not only for the PIRA. Any party that sought to gain influence over the conflict had to navigate the divided

¹⁸⁰ Krause, *Rebel Power*, p.143.

¹⁸¹ O’Leary, *A Treatise: Volume I*, p. 9.

character of its audiences; a task which was further complicated by the fact that they were not the only actor with agency to influence them. To the contrary, public perceptions of the independent things that were said or done by representatives of the government, military, church, or paramilitary groups, for example, were formed very much in relation to one another.

McGarry and O’Leary explain that there is a meta-conflict over the Northern Ireland troubles: ‘there are multiple disagreements over what kind of conflict it is, and about whether it is ‘one’ or ‘many’; in short there is a ‘meta-conflict’, a conflict about what the conflict is about.’¹⁸² This is certainly evident in the academic literature where competing perspectives about the application of key concepts have caused historiographical contests to persist and remain unresolved – including, for example, ‘sectarianism’ and the debate over the PIRA’s credentials in this regard.¹⁸³ This thesis will argue, however, that it is important to recognise that the meta-conflict was not born with the signing of the Good Friday Agreement; nor is it – or was it – contained to the pages of history books, memoirs, journals, or blogs. Rather, divergent and competing interpretations of policies, actions, events, and actors, were a live element of the conflict, and could play a significant role in shaping the future trajectory of the hostilities.

¹⁸² Ibid; O’Leary, *A Treatise: Volume II*; O’Leary, *A Treatise: Volume III*; John McGarry and Brendan O’Leary, *Explaining Northern Ireland: Broken Images* (Oxford, 1995), p.1.

¹⁸³ The contention on this subject (outlined below) fundamentally relates to the extent to which the PIRA can be said to have selected their targets on the basis of their known or presumed ethno-nationalist identity.

The rest of part I of this thesis is dedicated to outlining the various ways that the armed struggle was shaped by and adapted to the political conditions and political obstacles that have just been outlined.

The Campaign Against the Security Forces

Police and military personnel were a primary target for the PIRA throughout their campaign.

The data also reveals that PIRA's definition of security-force personnel could, at times, adopt a looser interpretation of the boundaries of organisation affiliation or duties (for example, when they killed reserve and cadet members of the RUC, UDR and British army).¹⁸⁴

The PIRA's claimed justification for killing members of the security forces was not widely accepted. For this reason, it was necessary for the PIRA to attempt to manage the narrative surrounding this element of their campaign with propaganda and use tactics that proved to be especially controversial sparingly.

The PIRA were acutely aware that they could benefit from the scenario whereby a significant proportion of public opinion, at home and abroad, viewed counter-insurgency policy or practice as disproportionately excessive to the security situation. Scholars whose work concerns the mechanisms of political violence, such as Peter Neumann and M.L.R. Smith argue that the groups who perpetrate it intend their actions to provoke an over-reaction from the democratic state they attack, in a bid to undermine the moral high ground

¹⁸⁴ A case in point occurred on 26 January 1975. A corporal in the Air Cadet force, 16-year-old Edward Wilson, was killed and five others were injured as they triggered a victim-operated IED the PIRA had primed to explode when the door to the Adjuncts office inside the Air Training Corps (ATC) hut – situated on the grounds of the Cavehill Primary School in North Belfast – was opened. Ibid., reference: 1298.

their opponent would naturally be perceived to hold by their electorate.¹⁸⁵ The PIRA was no different in this regard.

There are several examples of times when the PIRA homed in on unpopular policies or events where soldiers had been responsible for the deaths of civilians in their messaging to capitalise on public mood and the associated increased appetite that some had for their cause. David Charter's work reveals that events such as the Falls Road curfew, 3-5 July 1970, the introduction of internment without trial from 9 August 1971, and the fatal shooting of 14 civilians in Derry on 30 January 1972 or 'Bloody Sunday' were followed by an escalation in the armed struggle.¹⁸⁶ Escalation was possible at such times because a higher volume of people wanted to join or support the organisation. It is also revealing, however, that escalation was also framed as more justifiable at such times by the PIRA and used, retroactively, to present a narrative of the armed struggle that is most favourable to them.

¹⁸⁵ Peter R. Neumann and M. L. R. 'Smith Strategic terrorism: The framework and its fallacies', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 28/4, (2005), p.583.

¹⁸⁶ Charters, *Whose Mission*, p.117, 118-9, 131-135.

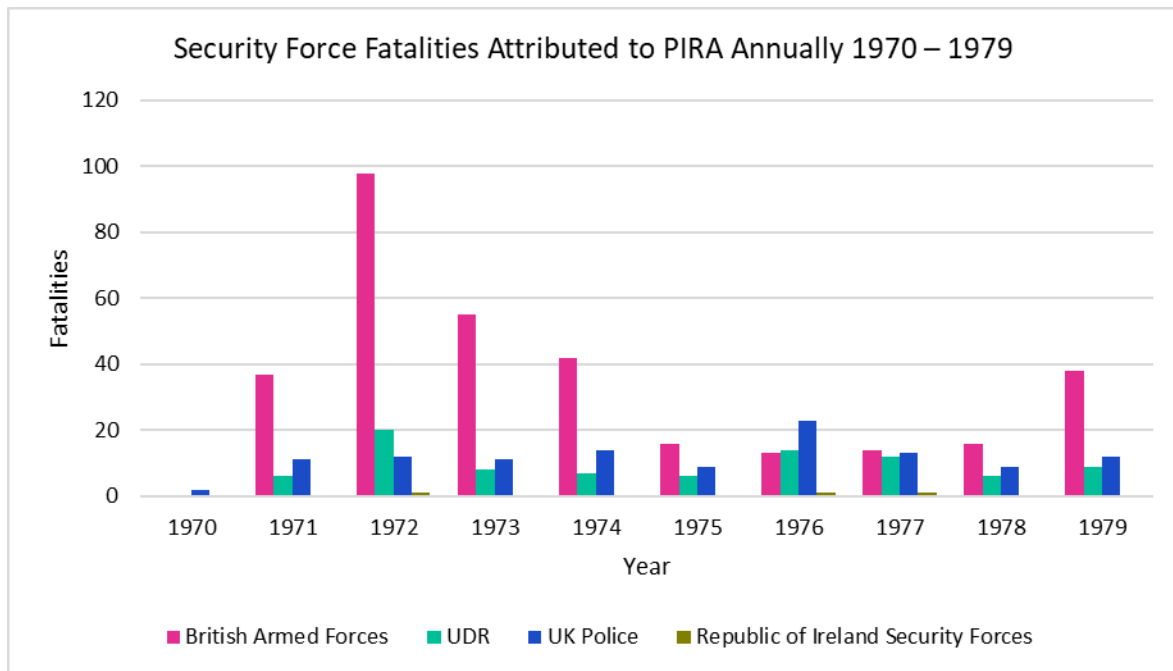


Figure 2.5 Security Force Fatalities Attributed to PIRA Annually 1970 – 1979.

Source: Kowalski, DPhil Dataset.

In terms of a chronological presentation of the armed struggle most primary and secondary sources of evidence agree that the newly formed PIRA Army Council agreed to proceed with a three-phase strategy from January 1970 (defence, then defence plus retaliation, followed by all-out offensive action) followed by ‘the long war’, then a combined military and political strategy commonly referred to as ‘the ArmaLite and the ballot box’. The sources are, however, a little less clear about precisely when the armed struggle progressed through each of these phases. There is no disagreement that the newly formed PIRA engaged in only a limited amount of fighting initially, focussing instead on gathering operational capacity and strength through recruitment, training, fund raising, and the acquisition or development of a weapons arsenal.¹⁸⁷ However, the literature provides more varied accounts of when it was that the PIRA went on the offensive.

¹⁸⁷ Molony, *Secret History*, p.90; Conway, *Southside Provisional*, pp.22-23.

Former PIRA chief of staff Seán Mac Stiofáin claims in his memoir that when the three-phase strategy was agreed in January 1970 it was decided that ‘as soon as it became feasible and practical’ the PIRA would commence retaliatory actions in the event that ‘British troops ill-treat or kill civilians’, and that the offensive phase would begin ‘[a]fter a sufficient period of preparation, when the movement was considered strong enough and the circumstances ripe.’¹⁸⁸ Mac Stiofáin claimed that the PIRA’s endeavours to target infrastructure and commercial properties (which he refers to as ‘sabotage operations’) commenced in the Spring of 1970.¹⁸⁹ There is no evidence to suggest this is an exaggeration. The bomb attack at an electricity transformer near the Bogside in Derry that occurred on 15 September 1970 was the 100th explosion of the conflict. A number of pubs, electricity pylons, customs posts and other commercial properties were targeted before this, some of which had been the work of the PIRA.¹⁹⁰

Mac Stiofáin asserted that the PIRA went on the offensive after the introduction of the policy of internment without trial in August 1971.¹⁹¹ More specifically the former chief of staff claimed that the PIRA did not actively target the UDR or RUC before this time:

After internment, IRA policy towards members of the Ulster Defence Regiment and the Royal Ulster Constabulary was also altered. Prior to this, IRA units had had instructions that UDR personnel were not to be subjected to deliberate attack. These instructions were obeyed, and the only two occasions on which the UDR had suffered casualties were both due to their practice of travelling in military-style jeeps indistinguishable from British ones.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁸ Mac Stiofáin, *Memoirs*, p.146.

¹⁸⁹ Author’s emphasis added. *Ibid.*, p.159.

¹⁹⁰ Deutsch and Magowan, *Volume 1*, p.75.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp.206-208.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, p.208.

After internment Mac Stiofáin claimed that UDR and RUC personnel were 'treated as legitimate combat targets at all times, whether on duty or not, armed or not, in uniform or not.'¹⁹³ The change of policy, he claimed, reflected the changing character of the UDR and RUC activities at that time including guarding and checkpoint duties, and participation in 'the brutal interrogation practices carried out on prisoners.'¹⁹⁴ This is a position he maintained over time including, for example, in 1997 in a television interview with broadcaster Peter Taylor:

Q: When did you turn to offensive action?

A: After internment. Before, anything else was a retaliation because the British army was bad to the people. So we thought retaliatory action and sabotage. But after internment we went to all offensive, all offensive action.

Q: But wasn't the killing of Gunner Curtis, the first soldier to die, an offensive action?

A: No. It was on retaliation for the bad treatment of British troops in Belfast.¹⁹⁵

Mac Stiofáin's categorisation of anti-property and anti-personnel violence before August 1971 as 'retaliation', and later operations as 'offensive' is, however, difficult to reconcile with the evidence. Under closer inspection, it would seem fair to suggest that Mac Stiofáin uses the terms 'retaliatory' and 'offence' somewhat strategically to portray his version of events. This is firstly because not all the bombing or shooting attacks before this point occurred in a scenario where the PIRA could conceivably claim they were providing communal defence or acting in direct retaliation for specific act. Before the introduction of internment there are several examples of the PIRA actively attacking security force

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ 'Interview with Seán Mac Stiofáin', Show#1603, Peter Taylor, 'Behind the Mask: The IRA and Sinn Féin', (Public Broadcasting Service), Front Line, (1997)
<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/ira/inside/mac.html>, (28/04/2020).

personnel or preparing materials to do just that: on 12 October 1970 one of the three explosions reported to have occurred close to the border was at the UDR drill hall at Kilkeel;¹⁹⁶ on 30 October soldiers (and civilians) were injured by gunshots in the riots that broke out in the Ardoyne area of Belfast, and Greencastle RUC station in Belfast was damaged by an explosion;¹⁹⁷ on 5 November army vehicles were attacked with stones and petrol bombs;¹⁹⁸ on 3 December RUC searches at Toombridge (Co. Antrim) discovered a large quantity of gelignite, detonators, and homemade 'claymore style' bombs;¹⁹⁹ an RUC foot patrol was 'hit by gunfire' on a foggy day in the Ardoyne on 3 January 1971 but did not sustain any casualties;²⁰⁰ two crossbow bolts were fired at troops in Belfast on 20 January;²⁰¹ a policeman was stabbed in Upper Library Street in Belfast on 27 January;²⁰² on 3 February machine guns were fired at army posts on the Crumlin Road and Cadogan Park in Belfast; and, on 6 February 1971 the PIRA shot and killed the first military casualty of the Troubles, Gunner Robert Curtis.²⁰³

If we accept Mac Stiofáin's argument that these incidents were acts of retaliation then we obscure precisely what differentiates the 'offensive' element of the armed struggle. Instead, it seems more accurate to suggest that the main differences between pre- and post-August 1971 PIRA activity was the volume that was perpetrated, and the lethality of the outcome. In the first few months after internment was introduced two RUC constables were killed by

¹⁹⁶ Deutsch and Magowan, *Volume 1*, p.78.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.80.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.81.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.84.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.88.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.90.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, p.91.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.92.

a victim-operated car-bomb on 12 August 1970,²⁰⁴ and two RUC constables were shot and killed during riots in the Ardoyne on 26 February 1971.²⁰⁵ But all other bombs and bullets the PIRA fired at members of the forces or the buildings and cars in which they dwelt before this time were non-fatal.

The PIRA were especially careful to manage the narrative regarding their activity during periods of ceasefire or truce. For example, the PIRA sought to avoid any indication that the ceasefire was being called out of material necessity on their part, by ramping up their military activities and issuing statements to clarify their position in the lead up to a ceasefire. The PIRA perpetrated a series of shooting and bombing attacks that ended at the stroke of midnight into 27 June 1972 to mark the start of a period of ceasefire which we now know would last just a couple of weeks (26 June to 9 July 1972). The PIRA's public statements at this time sought to bolster this narrative also. The day before the ceasefire (26 June 1972) the PIRA issued a statement from Dublin HQ that read:

The IRA, stronger and better equipped [than] ever before, stands on full alert to take defensive action, should the need arise, and ready to resume offensive action if the leadership decide that this is necessary.²⁰⁶

The PIRA were always clear that there were circumstances in which they would apply retaliatory violence or resume the armed struggle – including the killing of Catholic civilians by loyalist paramilitaries or the security forces. A case study that reveals the PIRA's endeavours to control the narrative surrounding exceptional cease-fire activity – authorised

²⁰⁴ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 40-41.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, references: 61-62.

²⁰⁶ Deutsch and Magowan, *Volume 2*, p.190.

or unauthorised – is the landmine ambush they perpetrated close to Cortreasla Bridge in Tullydonnell on 17 July 1975 that is sometimes referred to as the Forkhill ambush. This attack resulted in the death of four soldiers and inflicted serious injuries upon another.

The soldiers had gone to investigate a suspected IED that had been spotted a week prior by soldiers of the Green Howard regiment who had been patrolling the area.²⁰⁷ They reported seeing a five-gallon oil drum, a milk churn, and a white object set back off the road which 'didn't look quite right'. On the basis of this information aerial reconnaissance of the area was conducted and a subsequent clearance operation was planned for 17 July. On this day, the soldiers arrived by helicopter at 9 a.m. to investigate the suspicious object – they were dropped a short distance away to avoid alerting the local population and proceeded on foot to undertake their investigation. Scans were conducted to check for radio-controlled bombs in the area – none were discovered. The team still were considering that there could potentially be other devices in area so continued with their careful investigation.

Throughout this investigation the soldiers were regularly passing through a gap in the hedge (in single file). This gap was near the road and positioned approximately 25 – 30 metres from the suspect oil can. Unbeknownst to the soldiers, a 70lb landmine (a command-wire IED) had been dug into the bank at this gap in the hedge and was connected to a firing point positioned 396 yards away. At 9:50, the soldiers were once again passing through the gap in single file when a PIRA volunteer detonated the device, killing four of them outright.

²⁰⁷ Harnden, *Bandit Country*, pp.78-79; Smith, *3-2-1 Bomb Gone*, p.121; 17-30 July 1975 in 'NIO Summary 1974-1975', TNA, CJ 4/1787; Barzilay, Volume 2, pp.236-239; R v Thompson, *Northern Ireland Law Reports* (1977), NI 74.

The PIRA had claimed to be observing an indefinite period of ceasefire at this time.²⁰⁸ As such, it was important for the PIRA make clear whether (and on what basis) the incident represented a full or partial breakdown of the truce. On this occasion the PIRA asserted that the attack had a specific and discrete motivation that justified an exception to the wider cessation of their campaign of political violence. Specifically, the PIRA alleged that the explosion at Forkhill was motivated by two recent incidents when their members were killed by the security forces: 'retaliation for the shooting of Kevin Jordan on June 4 and of Charles Irvine on July 13'.²⁰⁹ Provisional Sinn Féin's (PSF) reasserted the PIRA's claims. On 20 July, for instance it is reported that a PSF spokesperson in Belfast said that 'there was no immediate danger of the ending of the Provisional IRA ceasefire, despite recent incident'.²¹⁰ It is evident that the statement not widely accepted. The *New York Times* reported, for instance, that:

Though the I.R.A.'s intentions are not entirely clear, there have been no indications that it is ready to end the cease-fire formally. However, the situation is deteriorating, and terrorist incidents are becoming more frequent.²¹¹

Statements that were issued by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (SSNI), Merlyn Rees, demonstrate that it was also considered imperative for Westminster to make their position (regarding the implications the attack held for political negotiations) clear to the public at an early stage. The earliest remarks on the matter that Rees issued expressed a sense of disgust over the PIRA's actions, and continued commitment to thwart political violence and find a political solution, but was sufficiently ambiguous about the way

²⁰⁸ The PIRA Truce commenced on 9 February 1975 and formally ended on 23 January 1976.

²⁰⁹ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives* references: 1411,1412,1413,1414.

²¹⁰ *Fortnight*, No.109 (August 1975), pp. 9-12.

²¹¹ '4 Soldiers Killed in Ulster by Bomb in a Milk Can', *The New York Times*, 18 July 1975, p.24, <https://www.nytimes.com/1975/07/18/archives/4-soldiers-killed-in-ulster-by-bomb-in-a-milk-can.html>, (18/08/2022).

ahead.²¹² However, a few days later (21 July 1975) the SSNI was willing to suggest that political negotiations (with the PIRA) were not entirely off the table at this stage. At the same time, Rees was explicitly clear that the incident had raised serious concerns which he framed as questions he would have to ask himself in the coming weeks:

The big questions I have to ask myself are: whether the leaders of the Provisional IRA are able to control their followers, for example, in South Armagh; whether such actions do not make the ceasefire meaningless; and whether they will not provoke reactions in retaliation against innocent Catholics. With every incident and each new Provisional statement such as the one it made today, there is speculation about the end of the cease-fire or changes in Government policy. The Government's policy is clear and has been explained fully in this House. It is that we are looking for a lasting and permanent peace and for a genuine and sustained cessation of violence which will create a new situation and make further progress possible on the basis of the statements I have made. The Provisionals political aims as restated today are well known. Provisional Sinn Fein is free to pursue them by peaceful and legitimate means. I must make it clear that the Government have not entered into any agreement.²¹³

Rees's comments support Niall O'Dochataigh's argument that both political violence and political rhetoric are tools of political negotiation. This is because they provide a clear illustration of how and why public statements could be intended to communicate multiple messages to multiple audiences. Specifically, in this case, Rees can be seen to be aiming to communicate a message of reassurance to the public, clarity of terms to the PIRA, and convey a sense of strength and control to both.

Disgust and outrage are common reactions sensed in the reporting of PIRA violence because in lieu of a mandate, justification could not be found for either the action or the outcome. It

²¹² Quoted in 'Four Killed at Forkhill', *Visor*, 17 July 1975, p.1, Northern Ireland Political Collection, Periodicals, Linenhall Library, Belfast.

²¹³ Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Mr. Mervyn Rees, 21 July 1975, Hansard, vol.896 column.37-433, <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1975/jul/21/northern-ireland>, (18/07/2022).

would be fair to say that some incidents stirred a greater sense of revulsion than others. For this reason, we can understand why the PIRA only used their most shocking tactics selectively.

There are only a few occasions when the PIRA desecrated the corpses of their victims by attaching them to explosive devices. The first instance occurred in April 1972 when the PIRA killed part-time UDR Corporal James Elliot in April 1972,²¹⁴ and there are just two subsequent examples of the tactic being used, both of which occurred in the 1980s.²¹⁵ It is unclear whether the PIRA had initially intended to use the tactic more widely than this. If they had, then it is highly likely that the intense criticism of the practice when it was first used with the body of James Elliot deterred them from doing so. The Corporal Elliot case worth exploring in further detail because is an example that demonstrates how public perceptions of the armed struggle were sometimes outside the PIRA's control to a more significant degree, when the common narrative relating to a single event was skewed by unreported and misreported details.

At 16:48 on 17 April 1972 three PIRA gunmen ambushed part-time UDR Corporal James Elliot as he was driving a lorry for work (in his other, part-time role of lorry driver) just

²¹⁴ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 341.

²¹⁵ Prison lecturer Leslie Jarvis was shot by the PIRA as he sat in his vehicle which was parked outside Magee College on 23 March 1987 before a bomb was planted on the back seat of his car that went onto kill two RUC officers subsequently. And the body of former PIRA volunteer & alleged informer, Anthony Shields, was found at Mounthill outside of Crossmaglen on 13 May 1980, close to explosive devices. McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 2816-2240; Toby Harnden, *Bandit Country* (London, 1999), pp.279-281; 'Fury on car-trap killings', *Daily Mirror*, 25 March 1987, p.16; 'Bishop forbids Requiem', *Irish Independent*, 27 March 1987, p.3; 'Obscene', *Belfast Telegraph*, 15 May 1980, p.1.

before the old Northern Customs Post on the road to Newry, forcibly removing him from the lorry before proceeding to kidnap him.²¹⁶ The coroner's inquest concluded that Elliot was killed the following day (18 April) at approximately 10 p.m., and that he died as a result of gunshot wounds to his head and chest.²¹⁷ On 19 April the recently deceased UDR corporal's body was placed on small country lane, near Altnamackin Village (Co. Armagh) by the PIRA to stage the scene for an ambush attack on the security forces.²¹⁸ The PIRA's morbid theatrics did not bring them any meaningful tactical or strategic gains on this occasion. To the contrary, the security force response was so large that the PIRA appear to have fled the area instead of firing the command-wire IED they had concealed. Two volunteers were captured and arrested by the southern side of the border and subsequently charged with possessing explosives with intent to endanger life.²¹⁹ Additionally, the posthumous damage which was caused to Elliot's body during the bomb-disposal (IEDD) process laid the foundations for the widely reported allegation that the UDR corporal had suffered extensive physical torture prior to death.

The coroner's inquest took place a month after the incident (26 May 1972). In the 5 or so weeks that elapsed between the killing of James Elliot and the inquest, critical details which it now seems fair to conclude were incorrect (misinformation) about the extent, and origins of the injuries sustained by the UDR Corporal had become widespread.²²⁰ These details

²¹⁶ 17-19 April in 'HQNI Diary, April – May 72', TNA, WO 305/4199.

²¹⁷ Coroner's Inquest relating to the death of Corporal James Elliott who died 18-19 April 1972', PRONI, BELF/6/1/1/37/62A. Thereafter: PRONI, BELF/6/1/1/37/62A.

²¹⁸ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 341; 17-19 April in 'HQNI Diary, April – May 72', TNA, WO 305/4199; Smith, *3-2-1 Bomb Gone*, pp.114-118.

²¹⁹ 'Body Booby-trapped in bid to Kill Police', *Daily Mirror*, 20 April 1972, p2.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

were also repeated in a House of Commons debate by MPs including the Reverend Ian Paisley and Mr James Kilfedder (Down, North) who said:

Numerous bullet wounds were in the body and the head and there were wounds in the hands. All this showed that the man had experienced great agony. One of his relatives said that they were horrified at the look of torture and agony still visible on the face. The fingers of both hands were blackened to the knuckles and holes were punched in the fingertips. Handfuls of grass and earth were clutched in the hands. One side of the face was smashed by what could have been either the heel of a boot or a rifle butt, to the extent that the nose was broken and displaced to one side. Both arms seemed limp and the genitals had been kicked until swollen out of all proportion. The teeth were smashed, he was shot through the wrists, the mouth, the neck, the throat and several times in the chest.²²¹

This description was not substantiated by the findings of the inquest into the killing of James Elliot which found that there ‘was nothing to indicate that he had suffered a physical ill treatment prior to death or that the body had been tampered with or mutilated after death’.²²² The fact that James Elliot was kidnapped by force and held under duress for a period of perhaps 30 hours before he was shot multiple times with a .45 calibre weapon is, in and of itself, a non-trivial experience.²²³ Instead, the coroner concluded that all injuries apart from the gunshot wounds to the head and chest were sustained posthumously, during the process of removing the body from the scene.²²⁴ The literature on IED disposal practices used in Northern Ireland at this time supports this claim.

²²¹ Mr. James Kilfedder (Down, North), 25 May 1972. Hansard, vol.837 column.1785-96, <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1972/may/25/northern-irelandira-activities>, (13/05/2022); Rev. Ian Paisley, 27 April 1972, Hansard, vol.835, column.1786-7, <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1972/apr/27/northern-ireland-corporal-james-elliott>, (13/05/2022).

²²² PRONI, BELF/6/1/1/37/62A.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ The sum of the post-humous injuries that are detailed include abrasions on the back, the left knee and the left chin, and are described in the report (in medical terms) as being ‘of a trivial nature’.

It was common practice for corpses, like other objects which were suspected to have been attached to explosives, to be attached to a rope and dragged a short distance so as to expose any devices or wires that were not visible or trigger any victim-operated switches without causing (further) loss of life.²²⁵ The depositions given at the inquest by the Major who oversaw the operation and the ATO involved in the IEDD process on the day make clear this process had been followed on this occasion.²²⁶ The file of records relating to the inquest also includes a note to the effect that the court thought it was important that pathologist's findings were made public to dispel myths that had been circulating that Elliot had been 'tortured to death'.²²⁷ But these findings do not appear to have entirely eroded the misinformation that had already taken hold by that point. The Rev. Ian Paisley requested that an official inquiry be set up to investigate the events surrounding the kidnapping and murder of Corporal Elliott and the subsequent recovery of his body – although this seems to have been concluded to have been out of scope.²²⁸

Another potent source of disgust that is apparent in the media reporting of PIRA activities was the targeting of security force personnel when they were off duty. Most security force personnel were killed when they were on-duty: 75% were on-duty, 3% were starting, finishing, or on a break from work, and 22% were killed when they were entirely off duty

²²⁵ Smith, *3-2-1 Bomb Gone*, pp.116-117; Paul Wharton, *First Light: The Explosive Memoirs of a British Army ATO* (Brighton, 2012), p.90.

²²⁶ The depositions of Major John Cobb stated: 'A grappling hook was finally fixed to the body, and it was pulled from the position in which it had been found'. A hand-written addition to the typeset disposition from the ATO went on to note that 'prior to the body being dragged approximately five yards [they] did not touch or move it'. PRONI, BELF/6/1/1/37/62A.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Mr Selwyn Lloyd, 27 April 1972, Hansard, vol.835, column.1787, <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1972/apr/27/northern-ireland-corporal-james-elliott>, (13/05/2022).

²²⁸ PRONI, BELF/6/1/1/37/62A.

and, therefore, at least, according to most definitions in a civilian or non-combatant capacity at the time.²²⁹ Clearly, the PIRA did not allow the distinction between on- and off-duty to be an impediment to their assassination campaign against the security forces. For this reason, the data pertaining to these fatalities has been coded by the author as security force personnel and 'off- duty' (rather than civilians). Nevertheless, the distinction between on- and off-duty continues to be an important element of the analysis in this thesis and so the distinction will continue be made throughout the thesis.

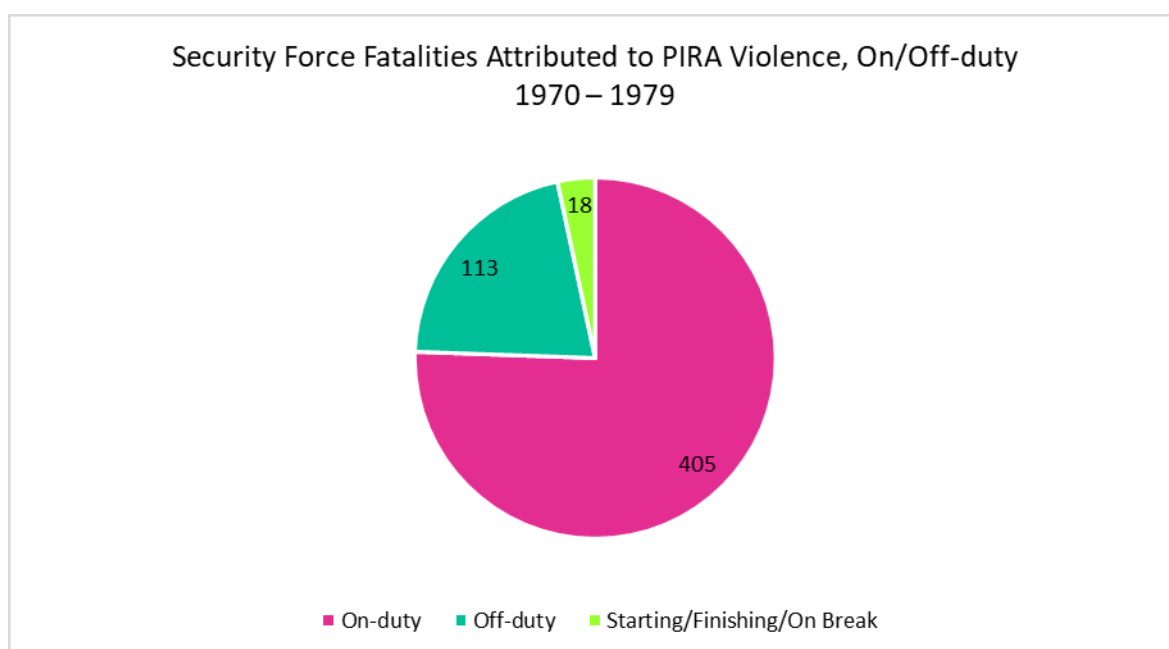


Figure 2.6 Security Force Fatalities Attributed to PIRA Violence, On/Off-duty 1970 – 1979.

Source: Kowalski, DPhil Dataset.

Cases in point that occurred during the 1970s include the killing of part-time Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve (RUCR) force constable, Kenneth Nelson, on 16 May 1976, and part-time UDR lance-corporal Gerald Cloete on 6 April 1977. Nelson was shot and killed by PIRA

²²⁹ J. Bower Bell, *IRA Tactics and Targets* (Dublin, 1990), pp.29-30; Patterson, 'Sectarianism Revisited', pp.345–6.

gunmen who were hiding in a nearby field with an automatic or semi-automatic weapon (thought to have been an ArmaLite assault rifle), approximately one hour after he had finished work, when he was in the process of tying his dog up outside of his home in Terryscallop, Derryfubble (Co. Tyrone).²³⁰ Cloete was ambushed and killed by two PIRA gunmen on his way to work an evening shift at the Du Pont factory at Maydown (Derry); it is reported that they intentionally crashed their van – a green Datsun they had hijacked earlier – into his car before opening fire at him as he attempted to escape from his vehicle, hitting him with at least six bullets.²³¹

Tactics such as these were clearly selected to give the PIRA an advantage over their opponent – but, given the PIRA did not have a political mandate to apply violence, they were more broadly viewed as sneaky and weak by the public and portrayed as such in the press. It is reported that, following the fatal shooting of colour sergeant John Ruddy (UDR) on 10 October 1972 that four priests in the border parish of Upper Killeavy in South Armagh read a statement condemning the killing at all mass services the following Sunday.²³²

When attacks on off-duty police and soldiers occurred in quick succession or resulted in the injury or death of others in the process, the backlash could be particularly amplified. There was a united and concerted response from the leaders of churches in Northern Ireland in February 1978, after the PIRA killed two part-time members of the UDR in as many days –

²³⁰ May 1976 in 'NIO Summary 1975-1976', TNA, CJ 4/1237; McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 1689.

²³¹ 6-20 April 1977 in 'NIO Summary 1974-1975', TNA, CJ 4/1787; McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 1910.

²³² McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 635; 'Coroner's Inquest relating to the death of John Ruddy who died at Daisy Hill Hospital, Newry, Co. Down. Date of death: 10 October 1972.', 15 June 1973, PRONI, ARM/6/1/1/26/29A.

Jack Eaglesham of 8 UDR and William Gordon of 5 UDR.²³³ The statements that were issued broadly condemned violence. But it seems that it was the specific characteristics of these events that set the tone of the comments. Both UDR men were off-duty, unable to defend themselves and, in the case of Gordon Williams, with their children at the time they were attacked; his 10-year-old daughter Lesley was killed as a result. For these reasons, leading figures from the Catholic church, Primate O’Fiaich and Bishop Daly, issued a joint statement that labelled the attacks as ‘particularly cowardly and vicious.’²³⁴ Their statement continued:

The callousness of these recent crimes is further accentuated by the fact that one of the victims of murder and one of the seriously injured are primary school children. The fact that the attackers must have known they were putting little children at risk before planting a lethal booby trap makes their action all the more repulsive. Only completely ruthless and heartless men without any feeling for human rights or the sacredness of human life could do such a thing.²³⁵

The event inspired Unionist leader, Mr. Harry West, to call for the reintroduction of the death penalty for certain crimes:

This would remove from our society those who are prepared to deliberately take the life of an innocent human being, thus making themselves undeserving of belonging to the human family.²³⁶

The matter of the death penalty was an issue that was raised on multiple occasions throughout this period and was especially common in the aftermath of civilian casualties. The minister who conducted the funeral of William Elliot, a postman who is believed to have been shot when he was mistaken for a detective in March 1975, is said to have questioned

²³³ ‘Church Leaders Unite to Condemn Terrorist Killings’, *Belfast Telegraph*, 9 February 1978, p.9; McKittrick et al., *Lost Lives*, references: 1987, 1988, 1989.

²³⁴ ‘Church Leaders Unite to Condemn Terrorist Killings’, *Belfast Telegraph*, 9 February 1978, p.9.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid.

the wisdom of those who abolished the death penalty, adding that: 'It seems today that it is too easy to get away with murder.'²³⁷ This public outrage was one of the reasons that the PIRA began to move away from the practice over time. The other principal concern connected to off-duty targeting was that this tactic could and did inspire backlash from loyalist paramilitaries (discussed below).

The data also reveals that the PIRA targeted and killed members of other security-force personnel who were completely outside their claimed programme of legitimate targets. IRA General Order 8 forbids 'military action against 26 County forces under any circumstances whatsoever'.²³⁸ Yet, the PIRA are also attributed responsibility for killing a total of 6 members of the Garda Síochána and a member of the Irish army in their campaign.²³⁹ Two of these fatalities occurred during the 1970s. The PIRA have actively denied responsibility for or remained silent about their involvement in both incidents. On the one hand, this is hardly surprising, given the obviously breach of internal policies. On the other hand, there is reason to believe that the PIRA had only intended to target one of these two individuals, and so we might question why it was that they felt it was necessary to deny their involvement in both incidents.

Inspector Samuel Donegan of the Garda Síochána was killed by a PIRA bomb close to Newtownbutler and the border between Fermanagh and Cavan on 8 June 1972. The device

²³⁷ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 1334.

²³⁸ Appendix 2: 'IRA General Army Orders (As amended by the Army Council October 1973)' in O'Brien, *The Long War*, p.407.

²³⁹ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 394, 1821, 2268, 2590, 2644, 3540.

had been left in the middle of a quiet country road which was just outside the Garda's jurisdiction; a fact that had escaped the attention of the soldiers and policeman on the ground at the time. The device was one of a number of claymore devices planted in the area that were being investigated. Second Lieutenant John Gallagher of the Irish Army was with Donegan at the time. According to Gallagher, neither himself nor Donegan interfered with the device – it simply exploded as Donegan bent over to inspect it.²⁴⁰ The seemingly spontaneous explosion of the box influenced news-media accounts of the incident for it was widely reported that the bomb may have been detonated by a radio control.²⁴¹ This was a credible assertion, given that the first known radio-controlled IED (RCIED) of the conflict had exploded not far from this location a few months earlier.²⁴² However, the evidence suggests that this was not the case.

Instead, it appears that Garda Donegan was killed by a victim-operated IED that had been intended to harm British security forces.²⁴³ Firstly, because Donegan is listed in the Garda roll-of-honour as having been killed by a booby-trap device (i.e., a bomb that is victim-operated).²⁴⁴ Secondly, because we know that PIRA had not been manning a nearby command-wire firing claymore device (presumably, because the large-scale security force response to these suspect devices would have exposed them to potential capture and

²⁴⁰ 'Samuel Donegan (Irish Garda Inspector) 8-6-1972', YouTube, (uploaded 23 Apr 2022), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICdND3nCO6w>, (21/08/2022).

²⁴¹ 'Garda death', *Belfast Telegraph*, 09 June 1972, p.3.

²⁴² The first RCIED exploded at a border post near Aughnacloy on 19 January 1972. Smith, *3-2-1 Bomb Gone*, p.123.

²⁴³ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 394.

²⁴⁴ 'Garda Síochána Roll of Honour', reference: 'Donegan, Samuel'.

arrest) meaning it was also unlikely that the PIRA would have been concealed nearby in order to fire a radio-control device.²⁴⁵

The PIRA were willing to admit that their victim-operated devices had claimed the lives of those they had not been planted to target on other occasions.²⁴⁶ Yet, the organisation has continually denied having any involvement in this bombing attack. A statement was issued to deny responsibility for planting the bombing device that killed Garda Donegan soon after the fact.²⁴⁷ When Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams was questioned asked about the murder in January 2013 he replied, 'I don't know who killed Garda Donegan'.²⁴⁸ Donegan's death was seemingly erased from accounts of the period in PIRA memoirs including that of Sean Mac Stiofáin.²⁴⁹

PIRA silence and denial on this occasion suggests that they were either wholly unwilling to admit to having been involved in activity that contravened their own policies – to save revealing a hypocrisy that could be used against them by their critics – or were concerned that an apology or explanation would not seem sufficiently credible on this occasion, because they had placed the indiscriminate weapon in such close proximity to the border. In either case, the PIRA appear to have been concerned with their public image. By contrast,

²⁴⁵ 8-9 June 1972 in 'HQ3 Diary, May – June 72', TNA, WO 305/4209.

²⁴⁶ See, for example, McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 1136.

²⁴⁷ 'Garda death', *Belfast Telegraph*, 09 June 1972, p.3.

²⁴⁸ Luke Byrne, 'Gerry Adams repeatedly denies knowledge of string of IRA murders', *Belfast Telegraph*, 30 April 2013, <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/gerry-adams-repeatedly-denies-knowledge-of-string-of-ira-murders-29233240.html>, (20/08/2022).

²⁴⁹ Mac Stiofáin discusses the landmine and boobytrap bombing offensive of the Summer 1972 specifically and chronicles the PIRA campaign in May and June 1972 more generally without mentioning the incident. Mac Stiofáin, *Memoirs*, pp.253-260.

the evidence suggests that there is little reason to doubt that the PIRA killed Garda Michael Clerkin intentionally on 16 October 1976 and had even more compelling reasons to deny involvement.²⁵⁰

Journalist and prolific chronicler of the Irish Republican Army, Tim Pat Coogan, explains that the killing of Michael Clerkin was a pre-meditated and conscious breach of 'IRA General Order 8', that was by no means taken lightly, and very much a one-off.²⁵¹ Garda Clerkin was lured towards a victim-operated device that the PIRA had concealed in a derelict cottage in the Republic of Ireland, by an anonymous tip concerning 'men acting suspiciously' in the vicinity. The attack was part of an escalating battle between republicans and prison/security staff over prison conditions and the maltreatment of prisoners in Portlaoise and Limerick.²⁵²

We know from other examples of PIRA activity that the organisation did not necessarily need to claim responsibility for an attack to send a message,²⁵³ and the case of Garda Donegan that the PIRA would have been reluctant to publicly admit to having broken general order 8. Coogan explains that there were significantly greater incentives for the

²⁵⁰ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 1821; Brian Hanley, *The Impact of the Troubles on the Republic of Ireland, 1968-79: Boiling Volcano?* (Manchester, 2018), pp.52-55.

²⁵¹ Coogan, *The IRA*, pp.425-426.

²⁵² *Ibid.*

²⁵³ For example, the PIRA did not claim responsibility for the Kingsmill Massacre on 5 January 1976 in their own name (event discussed below in this part of the thesis) but their involvement in and motivations for the attack (responding to sectarian assassination attacks by loyalist paramilitaries) have never been in doubt.

PIRA to remain silent on this occasion: a recent high-profile court case had demonstrated that it was a very real possibility that those involved could be sentenced to death.²⁵⁴

The prospect of facing the death penalty in the Republic of Ireland would obviously have been unappealing to the volunteers involved in the attack. However, the consequences were potentially far more significant to the PIRA for the outcome might be seen as adding weight to the case for reintroducing the death penalty in the UK (which had been suspended in 1965 and abolished in England and Wales 1969 and Northern Ireland after 1973) that was often raised in response to PIRA action. It is not possible to say for certain what impact state executions in the Republic of Ireland would have had for criminal law in the UK. However, it is possible to speculate that the reintroduction of the death penalty in Northern Ireland would mainly have served as a significant deterrent against joining the PIRA or continuing to participate in the armed struggle.

Former PIRA volunteer Eamon Collins explains in their memoir that that former members of the security forces were not legitimate targets:

[P]IRA policy (officially, at least) was that once people left the Crown forces – regardless of what they had done while they were members – then they were no longer targets.²⁵⁵

²⁵⁴ Coogan notes that a married couple, the Murray's, received the death penalty for killing an off-duty member of the Garda Síochána (Garda Reynolds) during a bank robbery on 11 September 1975. However, their sentence was commuted at the last minute. Coogan, *The IRA*, pp.425-426.

²⁵⁵ Collins, *Killing Rage*, p.107.

Still, the PIRA were responsible for the deaths of more than twenty former soldiers, police officers and prison staff. The fact that the incidents represent only a small proportion of the total armed struggle and are distributed sporadically across the decade, does not suggest that there is reason to believe that the PIRA maintained a conscious policy of targeting former members of the military, police or prison service.

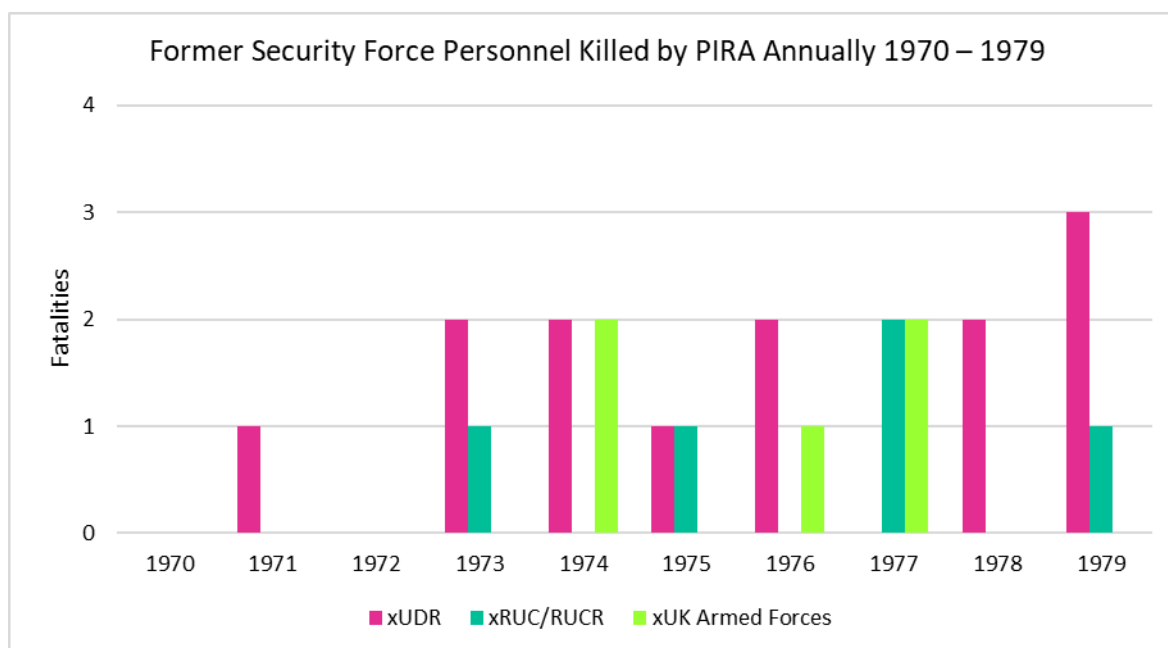


Figure 2.7 Former Security Force Personnel Killed by PIRA Annually 1970 – 1979.

Source: Kowalski, DPhil Dataset.

It can be difficult to understand why the PIRA killed former members of the security forces (retired or resigned) because the organisation did not hold a consistent line of argument in the version of events they claimed occurred on each occasion.

There are times when they issued an apology because, they claimed, the individual they killed had been mistaken for (and mistargeted as) security force personnel. The PIRA were willing to admit having killed a retired Prison Officer, Patrick Mackin, on the basis of

outdated intelligence on 3 February 1979.²⁵⁶ It is possible that the PIRA felt increasingly compelled to admit fault on this occasion than they might have otherwise, due to the fact they also killed the retired prison officer's wife, Violet Mackin, and a volunteer had been arrested and charged with the murders.²⁵⁷

The statement that was issued in the aftermath of the attack on the Mackin home may have admitted PIRA involvement in the murders but, it also implied that, in the PIRA's view, it was the responsibility of those who retire or resign from security force roles to update them accordingly.²⁵⁸ While this is a wholly unreasonable claim, there is some evidence to suggest that there may have been instances when former members of the UDR and RUC did contacted the PIRA via intermediaries to announce their resignation or retirement. Former volunteer John Crawley claims in their memoir:

I heard from several high-ranking [P]IRA commanders that they occasionally received messages from intermediaries acting on behalf of members of the RUC and the UDR who wished to inform the Provos that they had resigned from the police or army and sought assurance they were no longer under threat.²⁵⁹

The PIRA simply appears to have remained silent on other occasions when former members of the security forces were killed. George Walter Saunderson had retired from the UDR a year before PIRA gunmen shot and killed him on 10 April 1974 while he was standing in the kitchen of the Erne Country Primary School at Teemore (Co. Fermanagh) where he now

²⁵⁶ 1 – 11 February 1979 in 'NIO Summary 1977-1980', TNA, CJ 4/3692.

²⁵⁷ According to the PIRA, Violet Mackin was shot in the abdomen and legs as she struggled to protect her husband from the gunmen that came to their home in Oldpark Road, North Belfast. 1 – 11 February 1979 in 'NIO Summary 1977-1980', TNA, CJ 4/3692.

²⁵⁸ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 2074 – 2075.

²⁵⁹ Crawley, *The Yank*, p.181.

worked as a Headmaster: the PIRA do not appear to have made a specific claim of responsibility for this incident.²⁶⁰

Other times, the PIRA maintained that the victim was still involved in the security forces, although there is usually little evidence to suggest that these were credible claims. Ivan Acheson Johnston had recently left the RUC at the time he was abducted (on 13 December 1973), killed, and subsequently discarded by the PIRA at Rowan, Keady (Co. Armagh, on 15 December 1973).²⁶¹ Johnson had formally worked in the Special Branch unit. The PIRA claimed that the former constable admitted under the duress of their interrogation to having been still involved in RUC undercover operations and had both police identification and photographs of IRA suspects in his possession. These claims were, however, rejected by the RUC and remain unsubstantiated which suggests there may be reason to believe that the PIRA were potentially making false claims to mask evidence of either their errors or alternative agendas.²⁶² The notion that the PIRA may have remained silent or issued false claims in cases when former security force personnel were killed is supported by allegations raised in the memoir of former Eamon Collins. However, the fact that Collin's memoir was written after he had become disillusioned with the PIRA means that the views he expresses on this subject need to be treated with caution.

²⁶⁰ 11-24 April 1974 in 'NIO Summary 1974-1975', TNA, CJ 4/1787; McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 1066; 'McIvor at funeral of ex-UDR colonel', *Belfast Telegraph*, 12 April 1974, p.4; 'Brutal Killing in a Village School', *Belfast Telegraph*, 10 April 1974, p.1.

²⁶¹ 9 - 15 June 1973 in 'NIO Summary 1973', TNA, CJ 4/1024.

²⁶² 13-15 December 1973 in 'HQ3 Diary, December 73', TNA, WO 305/4220; McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 979.

Collins alleges that there were volunteers who at the very least, were willing to act on unverified suspicions that former members of the RUC or UDR had continued involvement – and might even have consciously disregarded credible evidence to the contrary to satisfy their eagerness to engage in violent confrontation. In Collins account, the PIRA responsible for killing Norman Hanna on 11 March 1982 had acquired access to information contained in the Housing Executive’s files on public housing in the Newry and Mourne districts (Co. Down) which confirmed that the former UDR man had retired from the force 6 years earlier, but that this information was disregarded because the man was believed to have been seen in UDR uniform at a checkpoint a few weeks prior.²⁶³ News reports following the fatal shooting attack confirmed that Hanna had indeed retired 6 years earlier.²⁶⁴ Collins said that he decided to issue a claim in relation to the attack that simply did not address the issue of the man’s retirement or admit that an error had been made:

The next day I rang up a local journalist and claimed responsibility for the operation on behalf of the South Down Command. I kept the statement terse. I said that the Active Service Unit had set out to attack a UDR man. I did not apologise for the mistake.²⁶⁵

The Role of Women in the PIRA

In previous periods of IRA history, women could only join a separate branch of the republican movement – the Cumann na mBán – and were not included in ‘active combat’ roles. By contrast, women were able to join the Provisional IRA from the early 1970s onwards.²⁶⁶ While it is not clear how many women joined or what percentage of the total

²⁶³ Collins, *Killing Rage*, pp.106-115.

²⁶⁴ ‘Man Shot Dead in Front of Family’, *Belfast Telegraph*, 11 March 1982, p.1; McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 2410.

²⁶⁵ Collins, *Killing Rage*, p.115.

²⁶⁶ Mac Stiofáin, *Memoirs*, p.150, 218.

membership was female, the evidence suggests that they played a variety of roles. For example, female members of the PIRA are known to have been involved in intelligence gathering, fundraising, armed robberies, hi-jackings, transporting weapons, and shooting or bombing attacks.²⁶⁷

...women have planted bombs; soldiers found 120 lbs of explosives in a pram being wheeled through the Ardoyne on 29 March [1973]. Women have also been involved in hi-jackings and armed robberies and indeed a small number [are] believed to belong to the Provisional IRA, have been killed in premature explosions and during exchanges of fire with the security forces. Thirteen women are at present serving sentences ranging from 2 to 12 years for serious offenses, and a further 11 are in custody awaiting trial. Two women are detained under the Detention of Terrorists (Northern Ireland) Order 1972 and interim custody orders have been served on another 2.²⁶⁸

Accounts by former members of the provisional IRA often go to great lengths to emphasise that women were considered to have equal status to men and were valued members of the organisation.

In the early 'seventies, a selected number of suitable women were taken into the IRA and trained. Some of the best shots I ever knew were women. So were the smartest intelligence officers in Belfast. From that time onwards women were admitted to the IRA on a basis of full equality with men.²⁶⁹

Women volunteers were certainly described in death notices as an equal to her male counterparts.²⁷⁰ However, it's hard to assess the extent to which attitudes towards women were quite as progressive as these sources suggest. Not least, because so little testimony

²⁶⁷ Mia Bloom, Paul Gill and John Horgan, 'Tíocfaidh ár Mná: Women in the Provisional Irish Republican Army', *Behavioural Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, 4/1, (2012), pp.60-76.

²⁶⁸ 23-29 March 1973 in 'NIO Summary 1973', TNA, CJ 4/1024.

²⁶⁹ Mac Stiofáin, *Memoirs*, p.218.

²⁷⁰ Vivien Fitzsimons was described simply as a 'Provisional IRA Volunteer' in reports of the premature explosion that killed her. See, 'IRA error Blast Couple Buried', *Belfast Telegraph*, 14 February 1973, p.4.

from former female members of the group survives. It is easier, by contrast, to access primary source material that reveals insight into external perceptions of women in the PIRA.

There was a bias in level of interest in that was paid to examples of women being involved in the PIRA or supporting their activities. The tabloid news media reports tended to highlight the sex of women PIRA in their reports. Dolours Price was described as an 'alleged IRA girl leader',²⁷¹ while Maria McGuire was 'the IRA girl who has quit the Provisionals'.²⁷² Interest was piqued when women were believed to have fired or simply brandished a firearm. In April 1973 the Army were investigating an "'IRA gun Girl" story':

Troops are investigating rumours that a sniper who shot a soldier in the arm yesterday at Newry Country Down, was a woman. An Army spokesman said that if the story was true, it would be the first time that the IRA had used a woman sharpshooter.²⁷³

Northern Ireland Office security reports confirm that five members of the PIRA (one woman and four men) brandished a firearm at a demonstration in the Roger Casement Park in Belfast to commemorate the 10th anniversary of internment on 11 August 1979.²⁷⁴ However, news reports of the incident reported that senior police figures did not believe the unidentified woman was in fact female:

The defiant IRA girl who brandished a revolver during a Belfast parade may have been a MAN. And the gun may have been made of WOOD. This is what police in the city decided yesterday after studying blown-up pictures of the Provo with the curly fair hair. A senior detective said: "The face has a mannish appearance, and the pistol looks like a dummy. When we looked closely at the film of the girl running up the street we became sure she was a phoney. No Woman I know runs like that."²⁷⁵

²⁷¹ 'Latest', *Reading Evening Post*, 11 September 1973, p.20.

²⁷² 'Sunday September 3', *Ireland's Saturday Night*, 09 September 1972, p.6.

²⁷³ 'Army Probe "IRA gun Girl" story', *Sunday Mirror*, 01 April 1973, p.2.

²⁷⁴ 8–21 August 1979 in 'NIO Summary 1978-1979', TNA, CJ 4/2915.

²⁷⁵ 'That's no lady. it's a gunman!', *Daily Mirror*, 14 August 1979, p.2.

Disgust was palpable in instances when women were involved in luring PIRA victims into an ambush via deceptive means; a phenomenon commonly referred to a 'honey trap' when there was female involvement.²⁷⁶ A case in point was the killing of three soldiers (and serious wounding of a fourth) on the evening of 23 March 1973 when two PIRA gunmen, armed with a pistol and a Thompson sub-machine gun respectively, arrived unannounced and opened fire on the men who were visiting an apartment on the Antrim Road in North Belfast at the time; which unbeknownst to them, had been rented specially so that two women, who had met these particular soldiers on a prior occasion, could lure them into an ambush under the false pretences of inviting them to a house-warming party.²⁷⁷

The NIO summary of security events for this week reported that a description of the 'girls' involved was widely distributed and that: 'Strong public revulsion was aroused by the murders and there has been a promising response to appeals for information.'²⁷⁸ 'Cold-Blooded' was a common descriptor, and there is great emphasis placed on the premeditation and deception elements of the incident, including the hiring of the flat and the staging of a 'hoax' party. At the inquest into Sergeant Muldoon's death the coroner is reported to have described the women involved (and the shooters) as 'animals' who took part in a 'cold-blooded conspiracy'.²⁷⁹ An army spokesman described the event as a 'cold-calculated murder operation'.²⁸⁰ The *Sunday Mirror* piece included pictures of what the article titled the 'Death Flat'.²⁸¹

²⁷⁶ Wharton, *Wasted Years*, pp.190-191.

²⁷⁷ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 805-807.

²⁷⁸ 23–29 March 1973 in 'NIO Summary 1973', TNA, CJ 4/1024.

²⁷⁹ Quoted in McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 805.

²⁸⁰ 'Murder of Soldiers planned days ago', *Belfast Telegraph*, 24 March 1973, p.1.

²⁸¹ 'Inside the Death Flat', *Sunday Mirror*, 01 April 1973, p.2.

Gendered reporting is not a phenomenon confined to the 1970s. On 2 November 1990, part-time UDR Sergeant Major Albert Cooper was killed by a PIRA bomb that had been planted in a car that was checked in to his car-repair garage in Cookstown (Co. Tyrone) by a 19-year-old student nurse, Geraldine Ferrity, who unbeknownst to Cooper was an active member of the PIRA.²⁸² Ferrity was in fact one of two people convicted for the murder in 1993. Still news reports and other public commentary of the attack focussed almost exclusively on her and was again, highly gendered in tone.²⁸³ 'Femme fatale kills soldier' reported *United Press International* (UPI).²⁸⁴ 'IRA bomb girl Jailed for Life' reported the *Birmingham Mail*.²⁸⁵ 'Nurse Gets Life' wrote the *Newcastle Journal*.²⁸⁶ And Mid-Ulster MP, William McCrea, offered a particularly gendered and otherwise provocative account while petitioning for stronger measures to be introduced, during the house of commons debate over the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Bill on 19 November 1990:

A woman who under God was given the privilege of carrying a child and of giving birth was the very one used by the devil himself to take away an innocent man's life.²⁸⁷

The criticism directed towards those who were found to have been involved in a 'honey trap' is certainly gendered. However, it is only a small sample of cases and under closer examination, was perhaps no less intense (albeit different in tone) than that which was directed towards the all-male or mixed groups of perpetrators of other PIRA ambush attacks that involved the similar tactics of deception. A case in point occurred on 9 March 1971

²⁸² McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 3156.

²⁸³ 'Murder of Soldiers planned days ago', *Belfast Telegraph*, 24 March 1973, p.1; 'Savage Murder of UDR man', *Sunday Life*, 04 April 1993, p.8.

²⁸⁴ 'Femme fatale kills soldier', *UPI*, 2 November 1990, <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1990/11/02/Femme-fatale-kills-soldier/5035657522000/>, (08/05/2022).

²⁸⁵ 'IRA bomb girl Jailed for Life', *Birmingham Mail*, 4 March 1993, p.4.

²⁸⁶ 'Nurse Gets Life', *Newcastle Journal*, 4 March 1993, p.6.

²⁸⁷ William McCrea, HC Deb, 19 November 1990, column. 73, <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/debates/?id=1990-11-19a.23.0#g73.1>, (08/05/2022).

when three Scottish soldiers were shot and killed on a quite rural road, the inquest concluded, after accepting a lift home from a group of (male) PIRA volunteers who had ‘pretended to be their friends’.²⁸⁸ The attack was met with a widespread outpouring of sympathy, and intense criticism of those who were involved. The coroner said: ‘this was not only murder but one of the vilest crimes ever heard of in living memory’.²⁸⁹ This may suggest that the criticism which was directed towards Geraldine Ferrity may have more to do with her specific role in the attack on Albert Cooper: being the one who actively deceived the victim.

Anne Dolan’s work on witness accounts of war in Ireland during in 1919-21 may offer an insight that supports this claim. Dolan uncovered a sense that perceptions of violence could be shaped by the notion that there were moral boundaries that could and should not be transgressed including where and when it was unacceptable for murders to take place, what types of forward preparation was abhorrent, and whose involvement was unfathomable. Outcry was regularly cited, for example, at the youth of the perpetrator ‘as if youth was not supposed to defile its innocence with such things’. While the wearing of rubber soled shoes (whether for sneaking or for comfort) became associated with the possession of darkly sinister intention.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁸ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 66-68.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁰ Anne Dolan ‘Death in the Archives: Witnessing War in Ireland, 1919–1921’, *Past and Present*, 253, (2021), pp.271-300.

The muted tones which were used to report other instances when women engaged in PIRA activity that did not result in the death or injury may offer a counterpoint in support of this claim. The incidents when female members of the PIRA were killed during the preparation of explosive devices tended to be reported without any especial reference to gender or disgust. When Vivienne Fitzsimons and Leon O'Hanlon were killed by the premature explosion of a bomb they were assembling on 10 February 1973, the press reported the incident in reasonably brief, dispassionate terms without specific reference to her sex or youth.²⁹¹ It seems logical to suggest that the reason that those who, like Vivienne Fitzsimons, lost their lives in premature explosions attracted so comparably benign media interest is that because they died during the preparation of weapons, rather than in the process of activity in which others were killed.

If outdated presumptions about gender roles generated bias in the reporting of cases when female perpetrators had been involved in PIRA operations, they created a cloak of invisibility under which women in the PIRA could act with impunity on other occasions. It was common for women's involvement in bombing, shooting or logistics operations to go undetected because women could transport weapons in prams, handbags or laundry baskets without drawing suspicion. Former bomb disposal expert Peter Birchall records an (undated) incident in his memoir where a 30lb IED was discovered inside a pram that was being pushed through a residential area.²⁹² The ArmaLite rifle used to kill Private James Hesketh at

²⁹¹ 'Mystery Bomb Blast Kills Ulster Couple', *Daily Mirror*, 12 February 1973, p.2; 'IRA error Blast Couple Buried', *Belfast Telegraph*, 14 February 1973, p.4; *Ireland's Saturday Night*, 17 February 1973, p.6.

²⁹² Peter Birchall, *The Longest Walk: The World of Bomb Disposal* (London, 1997), p.103.

the Junction of Grosvenor Road and Leeson Street in West Belfast on 10 December 1973 was pushed away from the scene of the sniper attack in a pram filled with laundry.²⁹³

Women were also prospectively less likely to appear suspicious to those manning military or police check points and could be used as drivers in weapons transportation operations for this reason. An HQ 3 Infantry Brigade intelligence summary report from September 1973 describes the tactics being used by the PIRA during an attempt to smuggle a cargo of weapons – containing 1000 rounds of assorted ammunition, a rifle, a large quantity of explosives and some electrical equipment – from the Republic of Ireland that was ultimately, thwarted by a vehicle checkpoint near the border, south of the village of Keady (Co. Armagh):

The technique being used to transfer arms across the border is interesting. It is thought that once the loaded car had crossed through the border area safely, two other cars, occupied by women, would have taken the consignment through to its destination.²⁹⁴

Finally, the honey-trap tactic could only prove deadly if the intended victim assumed that the women involved did not have ulterior motives or the capacity to be in any way dangerous. For all these reasons, women could be a deadly asset to the PIRA.

²⁹³ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 976; 3 – 9 November 1973 in 'NIO Summary 1973', TNA, CJ 4/1024.

²⁹⁴ Headquarters 3 Infantry Brigade, 'Intelligence Summary No. 36/73 for the period 3 September - 10 September 1973', 11 September 1973, TNA, WO305/4217.

Economic & Commercial Targets

The PIRA expected civilians to be affected by their campaign of political violence. They hoped that they would be affected in such a way that meant they would eventually become willing to agree to peace on their terms. Peter Neumann and MLR Smith emphasise the role that is played by the media in this regard:

Sophisticated terrorists will recognize that there is a potentially symbiotic relationship between themselves and the media. All they need to do is to satisfy the media's appetite for a 'good story'. ²⁹⁵

Certainly, the PIRA's large-scale or spectacular anti-property bombing attacks drew national and international media attention, and consequently instilled widespread fear in the civilian community, as images of the total devastation caused by PIRA bombing attacks, and shocking estimated costs of the damage entailed were front-page news. Persistent lower-intensity violence could also be effective in this regard. This is because each bombing or shooting attack the PIRA perpetrated added to the accumulative total sum of the security-related incidents and casualty statistics that were reported in the media, helping to generate a compounding sense that UK domestic security was out of control about which questions of government effectiveness might be raised. The fact that this was a concern is evident, for instance in a 1985 speech given by then prime minister Margaret Thatcher to the American Bar Association at the Albert Hall:

We must try to find ways to starve the terrorist and the hijacker of the oxygen of publicity on which they depend. ²⁹⁶

²⁹⁵ Neumann and Smith, 'Strategic terrorism', p.583.

²⁹⁶ Margaret Thatcher, *Speech to American Bar Association*, 15 July 1985, FO.29, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106096>, (03/08/2016).

The PIRA needed to be careful not to alienate the local population (Catholic community in particular) for the armed struggle could not be easily sustained without access to properties, funds and vehicles. As such, the PIRA needed to consider how to apply anti-property violence selectively. The memoirs of former members of the PIRA note that the organisation was selective in their bombing campaign for this reason and actively punished those who overstepped the mark in this regard:

One group had to be dismissed from the movement for the unofficial destruction of three petrol stations in an area which was almost one hundred percent Nationalist. The consequence of this foolish action was that the people had to go several miles out of their way for petrol and as can be imagined, were less than sympathetic with the Republican movement for a while.²⁹⁷

The PIRA also hoped that the counter-insurgency response to their activity would also antagonise the local population. Local communities were expected to be frustrated by the security checks that were put in place to maintain their safety or thwart the paramilitaries including home and vehicle searches and roadblocks.²⁹⁸ The volume of these increased exponentially over the years: house searches rose from 17,000 in 1971, to 36,000 in 1972, to 75,000 in 1973 and 1974, while 4 million vehicle searches took place between April 1973 and April 1974.²⁹⁹ The fact that this was a source of contention is evident by the fact that it was considered necessary to create materials to pass to drivers: one business card issued by the UDR read 'we apologise for interrupting your journey, but we do so in the interests of security',³⁰⁰ another stated 'Every night there are more than 1,000 soldiers of the UDR deployed for your protection. The men on this Check Point are a vital part of our overall

²⁹⁷ Mac Stiofáin, *Memoirs*, p.249.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.216.

²⁹⁹ Mulholland, *Short Introduction*, pp.72-73.

³⁰⁰ 'UDR Vehicle Checkpoint Card', 9707-18-42, NAMA, 1997-07-08.

campaign to defeat terrorism.’³⁰¹ Most added something like ‘You could help by joining us’ on the reverse. And advertisements that juxtaposed the inconvenience of vehicle searches against the prospect of further paramilitary bombing attacks with photos of each scenario and the tag line ‘Inconvenience could be this, Or... THIS’ were released through the press.³⁰²

The PIRA also needed to consider how the public viewed the tactics that they adopted to perpetrate attacks on commercial or economic targets. A highly controversial tactic the PIRA adopted to overcome challenges associated with gaining access to city centres to plant bombs following the implementation of vehicle restrictions, is known as the human- or proxy-bomb tactic.³⁰³ This essentially involved the forcible coercion of civilians into taking bombs to the targeted location, on behalf of the PIRA, generally by threatening the safety of the individual or their family. Sometimes the PIRA would even take the family of the soon-to-be proxy-bomber hostage to increase the coercive hold they had over the person.³⁰⁴

The PIRA first used this tactic in March 1973 and recycled it on a semi-regular basis throughout the 1970s.³⁰⁵ The tactic was commonly used in 1974 including (at least) seven attacks occurring between February and March,³⁰⁶ five between April and May,³⁰⁷ nineteen between June and July,³⁰⁸ and six in August.³⁰⁹ Sometimes multiple attacks were conducted

³⁰¹ ‘UDR Vehicle Checkpoint Card’, 9707-18-40, NAMA, 1997-07-08.

³⁰² ‘Vehicle Checkpoint/ Counter-terrorism poster’, 9707-18-38, NAMA, 1997-07-08.

³⁰³ Barzilay, *Volume 2*, p.163.

³⁰⁴ Patterson ‘Sectarianism Revisited’, p.350.

³⁰⁵ C.J.M. Drake, *Terrorists’ Target Selection* (Basingstoke, 1998), p.67.

³⁰⁶ 16 February - 1 March 1974 and 2-15 March 1974 in ‘NIO Summary 1974-1975’, TNA, CJ 4/1787.

³⁰⁷ 25 April - 8 May 1974 in ‘NIO Summary 1974-1975’, TNA, CJ 4/1787.

³⁰⁸ 20 June - 3 July 1974, and 18-31 July 1974 in ‘NIO Summary 1974-1975’, TNA, CJ 4/1787.

³⁰⁹ 1-14 August 1974 in ‘NIO Summary 1974-1975’, TNA, CJ 4/1787.

on a single day. For instance on Saturday 31 August 1974, it was reported that there was 'another proxy car-bomb blitz on Belfast city centre':

There was another proxy car-bomb blitz on Belfast city centre. There were three car-bombs in Ormeau Avenue, one in Donegall Street and one in Victoria Street. This last one was placed outside Marlborough House which contains some government offices and also the HQ of the Faulkner Unionist Party.³¹⁰

On all but one occasion (in October 1990), the proxy-driver survived – the bomb detonated or was neutralised by the security forces well after the victim had left the vehicle, suggesting that the principal function of the tactic was to deliver PIRA weapons, rather than kill those who were forced to drive them; although the fact that the tactic was highly distressing to those unfortunate enough to be involved is clearly apparent in records of their memories of the experience.³¹¹ It is thought that the primary reason why there is only one fatal example, and the PIRA moved away from the proxy bombing tactic more generally by the spring of 1993,³¹² was the severe backlash against the practice.³¹³

The only fatal proxy-bomb incident occurred on 24 October 1990 at a vehicle checkpoint on the border with Donegal. Former ATO Steve Smith explains that a different tactic may have been used on this occasion because the civilian was an individual the PIRA considered to fall within the category of person they deemed to be a 'collaborator':

³¹⁰ *Fortnight*, No. 88 (Sep. 6, 1974), p.12.

³¹¹ See account by former 'proxy' driver Séamus Goan, who was forcibly involved in the aforementioned proxy-bomb 'blitz' on 31 August 1974 in Cathal Goan, 'Experiencing the Troubles', in Jim Smith (ed), *Remembering the Troubles: Contesting the Recent Past in Northern Ireland*, (Indiana, 2017), pp.179-195.

³¹² Just before midnight on the evening of 24 April 1993 the PIRA used the tactic in north London. 'Two more bombs explode in North London', *United Press International*, 25 April 1993, <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1993/04/25/Two-more-bombs-explode-in-north-London/9899735710400/>, (15/04/2022).

³¹³ O'Brien, *The Long War*, pp.52,55-56.

Patsy Gillespie was a 42-year-old, Roman Catholic, married man with three children. He was also a canteen worker at the Fort George Army base. As far as the [PI]RA was concerned, this made him a 'legitimate target'. ³¹⁴

Collateral Damage

The violence perpetrated by the PIRA during the troubles has been portrayed in the printed press as having been meaningless, devoid of strategic logic, inhuman and barbaric. The headlines which followed events in which civilian casualties (collateral damage) resulted were intensely critical. The PIRA attempted to deal with this in a few different ways. Sometimes they issued apologies. Other times the PIRA denied responsibility for the actions which produced it, or simply remained silent about the matter.

An example of an incident of PIRA violence that caused 'collateral damage' was the Dunmurry train bomb disaster of 1980 which killed one PIRA member, two civilians, and inflicted horrific burns-injuries upon many others. ³¹⁵ It is commonly accepted that this attack went terribly wrong. The plan had been for the PIRA volunteers to alight at the penultimate stop where they would use a payphone to alert the security forces to the fact that the train which was now speeding towards its final stop, Belfast Central Station, contained a blast-incendiary device that was primed to explode not long after the train would arrive; allowing sufficient time for the civilians to be evacuated, but it was hoped, crucially insufficient time for the device to be disarmed before it had a chance to cause

³¹⁴ Smith, *3-2-1 Bomb Gone*, p.104.

³¹⁵ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 2208-2210; NIO, Northern Ireland Office, *The Day of Men and Women of Peace Must Surely Come* (Belfast, July 1989), pp.26-27; *Belfast Graves*, pp.168-169; 15 - 29 January 1980 in 'NIO Summary 1977-1980', TNA, CJ 4/3692; January 1980 in 'NIO Summary 1979-1978', TNA, CJ 4/3095.

extensive material damage to station. But the incendiary device actually exploded as the two PIRA youths were attempting to prime it, killing one of the bomb planters outright (Kevin Delaney), in addition to killing two civilians (Mark Cochrane and Abayonni Max Olorenda) and inflicting horrific burns-injuries upon others. A local haulage contractor who witnessed the explosion later deposed: 'I was locking up my lorry when I heard a dull thud. I looked around and saw the carriage of the train was just a ball of fire.'³¹⁶

The PIRA could not credibly deny involvement in the bombing attack due to the fact that their members were lying dead and injured at the scene of the explosion. But they did feel compelled to issue a public statement of apology:

unfortunately, the unexpected is not something we can predict or prevent in the war situation this country is in. The consequences of the unexpected are often grave and distressing, as Thursday night's accident shows. To all the bereaved families we offer our deepest and heartfelt sympathy.³¹⁷

The general tone of revulsion with which such statements were often met is well demonstrated by an article in the Northern Ireland Office booklet that was issued in the immediate aftermath of the premature explosion on the Ballymena to Belfast train incident of 1980, that likened the (included) image of the newly disfigured face of 23-year-old surviving PIRA bomber, Patrick Flynn, to 'a visual epitaph to the wickedness of terrorism'.³¹⁸

³¹⁶ 'Coroner's Inquest relating to the death of Abonyoni Olorunda', 23 May 1980, PRONI, ANT/6/1/1/28/106A. Thereafter: PRONI, ANT/6/1/1/28/106A.

³¹⁷ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 2208.

³¹⁸ NIO, *The Day of Men and Women of Peace*, p.26-27.

There was more scope on other occasions to deny involvement or shift the blame onto others – a practice that Abrahms notes is referred to in the literature more generally as scapegoating – and occasions when the PIRA decided to do just that.³¹⁹ The PIRA maintained it was army who shot and killed a 14-year-old girl, Kathleen Feeney, when they ambushed their foot patrol on Lecky Road in the Bogside area of Derry on 14 November 1973, right up until 2005 when they issued a belated admission and apology to the family:

Our failure to publicly accept responsibility for her death until now has added to the hurt and pain of the Feeney family. The leadership want to apologise unreservedly to the Feeney family for the death of Kathleen and for all the grief that our actions have caused.³²⁰

Kathleen was the younger sister of then SDLP councillor Danny Feeney, and so it is likely that the PIRA may have also opted to deny responsibility for her death due to the elevated status of the victim, or because they wanted to reduce the likelihood or extent of the transfer of local support from themselves (representatives of the violent republicanism) to their rivals – the non-violent alternative option of supporting constitutional nationalism with the SDLP.

The PIRA also issued statements that attempted to shift future blame for collateral damage that might occur in such instances. The PIRA in South Armagh claimed responsibility for a shooting ambush of the two army patrols who were tasked with guarding the Royal Engineers that were undertaking necessary repairs to the army base in Crossmaglen (Co. Armagh) – which had been caused by a PIRA bomb that was left in a skip outside the entrance way the previous day – that resulted in the death of Private Stephen Robert Hall

³¹⁹ Abrahms, *Rules for Rebels*, p.182.

³²⁰ Quoted in McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 961; HQ3 INF, Daily log, 14 November 1973, TNA WO 305 4219; 10-23 November 1973 in NIO Summary 1973', TNA, CJ 4/1024.

on 28 October 1973. Their claim complained that their efforts to target the soldiers were hampered by civilians being in the general vicinity:

If civilians persist in remaining so close to British soldiers, we cannot be held responsible for possible civilian casualties in the future.³²¹

Other times the PIRA remained silent. The PIRA did not issue a statement to explain that they had shot and killed a sailor from the Netherlands, W.E.L. Rena (whose name was commonly misreported as Rene Heemskerk),³²² on 11 November 1971 because they mistook him for an off-duty soldier.³²³ Their unwillingness on to admit fault on this occasion may reflect the organisations desire to avoid giving the impression that they were paranoid or trigger-happy.

Rene was killed in a Dentist's surgery on the Grosvenor Road in West Belfast, where he was seeking dental treatment while his ship, MV Waardrecht, was berthed at Pollock Dock. Gunmen burst into the dental surgery with a submachinegun and opened fire – eight bullets hit the Dutch sailor, killing him outright. Early reports suggested the police believed that Rene was shot because he was mistaken for an off-duty British soldier because rumours about undercover soldiers were circulating around nationalist districts at the time and the Dutchman appeared to be an 'outsider'.³²⁴ A few days after the shooting the *Belfast Telegraph* reported that: 'Detectives main line of inquiry is that the young seaman may have

³²¹ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 950.

³²² Several contemporary press reports mistakenly reported the sailor's name as 'Rene Heemskerk' – Rene is their surname, and they from a place called 'Heemskerk' in the Netherlands. Including: McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 181.

³²³ 'Dutch Sailor, 18, Slain in Belfast Dentist's Office', *The New York Times*, 13 November 1971, p.3.

³²⁴ 'Belfast Service for Shot Dutch Seaman', *Belfast Telegraph*, 15 November 1971, p.3.

been shot because of the military air which a close-cropped hair style gave him. He had his fashionably long hair cut three days before.’³²⁵ Reports of the eyewitness testimonies given during the inquest make clear that the sailor stood out, and intimate that this was precisely how and why the gunmen had come to be interested in, and ultimately responsible for killing the man. A receptionist who had been working that day, recalled a young man coming into the waiting room and asking her if she had seen a ‘tall ginger-haired fellow’ in there; when she asked if they knew the name of the person in question the youth told her that they didn’t but that the name didn’t matter because ‘you couldn’t miss him’.³²⁶

It would be fair to say that the PIRA leadership would have had little desire to associate the organisation with the haphazard and impulsive dynamics of this event. Sadly, it is perhaps more realistic to suggest that the organisation may have felt a lack of compulsion to claim and apologise for their actions on this occasion because the victim was a foreign national who was unconnected to the local population who, by comparison, could not be ignored or lied to as easily when the PIRA’s actions resulted in the deaths of their direct relations and neighbours.

The PIRA’s ceasefire operations were also seemingly prone to dysfunction. The change of the political landscape however, meant that the civilian casualties that resulted were prospectively more damaging to the PIRA’s agenda. As such, the PIRA were commonly

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Another dental patient who was in the waiting room remembered a ‘blond haired sailor, dressed in bright clothes. ‘Open verdict on shot Dutch seaman’, *Belfast Telegraph*, 13 April 1972, p.3.

unwilling to claim responsibility for any actions they had taken which had resulted in civilian casualties at such times.

A case in point is the killing of Margaret Kilfedder, whom sources seem to agree was mistargeted by the PIRA on 1 June 1975, although the organisation did not claim responsibility for the attack. Margaret Kilfedder was killed by a bomb that exploded as she slept in the home that she rented with her husband in Garrison (Co. Fermanagh). The device is thought to have been planted to target the previous owner of the bungalow, who was a member of the UDR but moved away from the area after receiving threats to his life. It is reported that the device, a 'cylinder bomb', was 'almost certainly left by the [P]IRA'.³²⁷

The PIRA's silence over civilian casualties that occurred during ceasefire periods can make it even more challenging to interpret the events. The shooting of a Catholic civilian, local lorry driver Bernard Norney in Ballymurphy (West Belfast) on 27 June 1972 by PIRA gunmen is one such example where it is unclear precisely what happened, in what order, and why. There are some details of the event about which it is apparent in the available evidence that there is broad agreement: at approximately 7 a.m. as Bernard Norney was on his return journey home after having taken his wife to a nearby school where she worked as a cleaner; the PIRA were operating a roadblock (an illegal vehicle check point) in the area at the time; Bernard Norney was shot by the PIRA as whilst driving his car; the shooting started immediately after Norney had driven through the PIRA's roadblock, by the armed PIRA

³²⁷ *Belfast Telegraph*, 2 June 1975, p2; McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 1384; *Fortnight*, No. 108 (Jul. 4, 1975), pp. 9-12.

volunteer(s) manning the checkpoint; one of the PIRA gunman asked a local bread delivery driver who was in the general vicinity soon after the shooting had occurred, to drive Norney to hospital for treatment; he was taken to hospital, but died sometime before they arrived.³²⁸

The deposition of a detective-constable who was based at the R.U.C. station in Springfield Road, that was taken at the coroner's inquest on 27 March 1973 states that Norney was shot as he drove away from the roadblock: 'Mr Norney went through this roadblock without being fired on and [then] was shot.'³²⁹ However, it is unclear whether Norney stopped at the roadblock or not, or what his motivation would have been in either case. Did Norney consciously ignore the illegal checkpoint because he did not accept the PIRA's self-claimed right to police the community? Did Norney drive straight past the make-shift checkpoint because it was not sufficiently signposted or actively manned at that time in the morning to grab his attention? Did Norney speed past the armed PIRA volunteers in a fraught bid to escape the danger he perceived himself to be in? Or did Norney in fact stop at the roadblock, pass whatever checks the PIRA insisted and begin driving away – only to come under fire a few moments later? It is also unclear how we might characterise the PIRA gunmen(s) decision to open fire in any of these (or other) scenarios: perhaps they fired to maim or kill Norney in punishment for failing refusing to accept their self-imposed authority? Or perhaps in the heat of the moment the gunmen misperceived the vehicle passing them as a potential threat and shot in panic out of a mistaken sense of self defence.

³²⁸ 'Coroner's Inquest relating to the death of Bernard Norney who died 27 June 1972', 27 March 1973, PRONI, BELF/6/1/1/38/52A, thereafter: PRONI, BELF/6/1/1/38/52A.

³²⁹ Ibid.

The reality that the circumstances pertaining to this event are unclear is reflected by the fact that the coroner recorded an open verdict, and the incident was not claimed or contested by the PIRA. At the very least, it is reasonable to suggest that the incident is best understood in the context of the pressures of the PIRA venturing into the new territory of announcing a ceasefire; and against the background of an escalating campaign of violence that was being waged against Catholic civilians in the area by loyalist paramilitaries at the time.

Bernard Norney was shot and killed on the first day of the PIRA's first ceasefire – a time when it was important for the PIRA to appear to have ceased all proactive (or at least 'unprovoked') activity. However, the incident also occurred at a time and in a place when there had been an escalating volume of loyalist attacks on members of the Catholic civilian community in the area – a time when the PIRA would have wanted to present themselves as successful defenders of the local Catholic population. It would seem that on this occasion the PIRA had planned to do this by ramping up their so-called 'defensive' activities in West Belfast.

Several witness accounts reported that on 27 June 1972 the PIRA circulated leaflets in Ballymurphy that warned residents 'that control of law and order in the area now rested with the Provisionals and that law-breakers would be dealt with in a manner hitherto untested' which, they claimed, would be 'particularly impressive'.³³⁰ It would not be

³³⁰ Deutsch and Magowan, *Volume 2*, p.190; *Fortnight*, No. 43 (1972), pp. 9-11.

unreasonable to assume that these leaflets had been planned and prepared for distribution in advance of the fatal shooting that occurred early that morning – if so, we could say that at the very least the PIRA were hoping to exert influence in the area through by threatening extreme violence; and at most, may have even agreed locally that it would be applied.

On the one hand, this evidence might lead us to conclude that the PIRA gunmen made a conscious decision to open fire on Norney's vehicle in punishment. On the other hand, it is equally possible that the local climate of intimidation could have fuelled the kind of panicked fear-based reactions from Norney, the PIRA, or both as hypothesised above. The ominous atmosphere may at the very least explain why the civilian witness who drove Norney to hospital after the fatal shooting attack chose to see, or at least recall, as little as possible of the events that occurred that morning:

I didn't know the two men who approached me. I never looked at the man in the back of the car, but I guessed that he had been shot. I did not see any road block near where the car was.³³¹

Exceptional incidents of violence perpetrated by paramilitary groups such as the PIRA to receive disproportionately negative and lasting attention. An obvious case in point is the news media reports that followed the Birmingham pub bombings – a multi- site bombing attack in England which included bomb warnings that were insufficient and imprecise, that killed 21, and injured 182 individuals on 21 November 1974.³³²

³³¹ PRONI, BELF/6/1/1/38/52A.

³³² McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 1246-1264, 1276, 1281.

‘Those bombs were inhuman and sadistic’ reported the *Daily Mail*;³³³ ‘unconscionable acts for which there is no explanation only madness’ wrote the *Irish Times*; ³³⁴ while the *Dungannon News & Tyrone Courier* simply labelled the attack as ‘brutal and insane’.³³⁵ Other reports adopted more loaded language when describing the event. Several accounts referenced the holocaust or Nazi Germany in their reports of the 1974 attack at Birmingham. *The Fermanagh Herald* headlined its reporting of the Birmingham pub bombings as ‘The Holocaust’.³³⁶ *The Guardian*, for instance quoted a spokesman for the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland who said: ‘Where does this end? Sane people must stop the province sinking into a holocaust of self-destruction’.³³⁷ The *Daily Mail* reported the Birmingham pub bombings as ‘an inhuman display of vengeance in the mould of Lidice when the Nazis destroyed an entire village in order to avenge the slaying of one of their number.’³³⁸ An opinion piece in the *Irish times* commented that ‘the story of last night’s holocaust is the ultimate in horror’.³³⁹ The Birmingham pub bombings was not the only incident that was reported in such terms.

The intense outrage that followed high-profile incidents like the Birmingham pub bombings was of concern to the PIRA because it could close down opportunities that otherwise may have been available to engage in political negotiations,³⁴⁰ or justify actions against them. The evidence presented throughout David Charters *Whose Mission Whose Orders* (2017),

³³³ *Daily Mail*, [Manchester Edition], 22 November 1974, p.2.

³³⁴ *Irish Times*, 22 November 1974, p.1.

³³⁵ *Dungannon News & Tyrone Courier*, 27 November 1974, p.3.

³³⁶ *The Fermanagh Herald*, 23 November 1974, p.8.

³³⁷ *The Guardian*, 6 January 1976, p.1.

³³⁸ *Daily Mail*, 22 November 1974, p.1.

³³⁹ *Irish Times*, 22 November 1974, p.4.

³⁴⁰ Ó Dochartaigh, *Deniable Contact*, p.48.

and Gary McGladdery's work on the PIRA bombing campaign in England demonstrate that there was a relationship between cases when PIRA violence resulted in collateral damage and the timing and severity of counter-insurgency measures that were enacted.

Charters demonstrates that it is no coincidence that Operation Motorman was launched in the shadow of Bloody Friday, a PIRA bombing attack which claimed the lives of 9 and injured more than a hundred. Rather, Civil authorities and military commanders are recorded to have been keen to exploit 'the IRA's missteps' with a timely response; capitalising on the limited availability of a community feeling or popular 'mood' that was conducive to harsh actions against the PIRA being widely perceived as acceptable and justifiable.³⁴¹ Gary McGladdery highlights broader ramifications of the Birmingham Pub Bombings for the PIRA including the passing of legislation which among other things, proscribed the organisation as illegal (the Prevention of Terrorism Act, November 1974).³⁴² The fact these measures had an impact on the PIRA is evident by noticeable dip in PIRA activity in England in the aftermath.³⁴³

There is evidence to suggest that the PIRA attempted to learn from their mistakes and take actions that reduced the likelihood of collateral damage occurring in the future – this will be discussed in part II of the thesis. The fact that the PIRA's operations often continued to

³⁴¹ Charters, *Whose Mission*, pp.178,170,175.

³⁴² Gary McGladdery, *The Provisional IRA in England: The Bombing Campaign, 1973-1997* (Dublin, 2006), pp.90-95.

³⁴³ Ibid.

involve some degree of risk being posed to the safety of non-combatants and would sometimes result in collateral damage as a consequence is examined in part III.

Finally, it is worth noting that revulsion at the very prospect of collateral damage is notable in media reporting of events where risk was apparent but did not materialise. This was especially the case when children could perceivably have been harmed by PIRA violence.³⁴⁴ Press reports of the PIRA's failed attempt to assassinate an RUC reservist in a shooting ambush attack on the school bus he was driving along the Kilsally to Adboe road in Tyrone on 21 January 1976 focussed on local outrage at the danger in which the two passengers on the bus, two schoolgirls, were placed in. A police officer was quoted as saying that the PIRA had reached an 'all-time low' in their campaign against the community as a whole in Northern Ireland, adding 'What more cowardly action could you have than an attack on a school bus.'³⁴⁵ The police officer also highlighted the prospective danger the girls would have been in had the PIRA killed the bus driver as they intended: 'the bus would almost certainly have crashed, and the two children could have been killed or badly hurt'. The focus on prospective risk to children is not confined to news media reporting in the 1970s. After a PIRA bomb which had been planted close to St Colm's School in Belfast was defused on 3 August 1989, an RUC spokesperson was reported to have said: 'it could have detonated at any time, with horrific consequences to the pupils.'³⁴⁶

³⁴⁴ Other examples include: McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 159, 331-332.

³⁴⁵ '3 lucky to escape as gunmen rake school bus', *Belfast Telegraph*, 21 January 1976, p.1.

³⁴⁶ 'School Bomb', *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 4 August 1989, p.14.

The Campaign Against Traitors, Collaborators, and Anti-Social Behaviour

The PIRA made clear that collaboration with the security forces was punishable by death, and that anti-social behaviour was subject to other forms of PIRA punishment. The alleged crimes of collaboration that individuals were punished or killed for having actually – or been perceived – to have ‘committed’ ranged from fraternising with the enemy (engaging in romantic or friendly relationships with police or military personnel), to participating in the apparatus of government/ constitutional politics (that is, accepting any form of payment or voluntary employment in any position in government, or the civil, legal or justice systems), to strengthening the counter-insurgency initiative against the organisation by working with the security forces (or ‘collusion’). The PIRA also perpetrated (non-fatal) punishment attacks against people they believed to have exhibited some form of anti-social behaviour. This could range from joyriding, petty-theft, drug dealing, paedophilia, to informing on the PIRA or sabotaging their campaign.

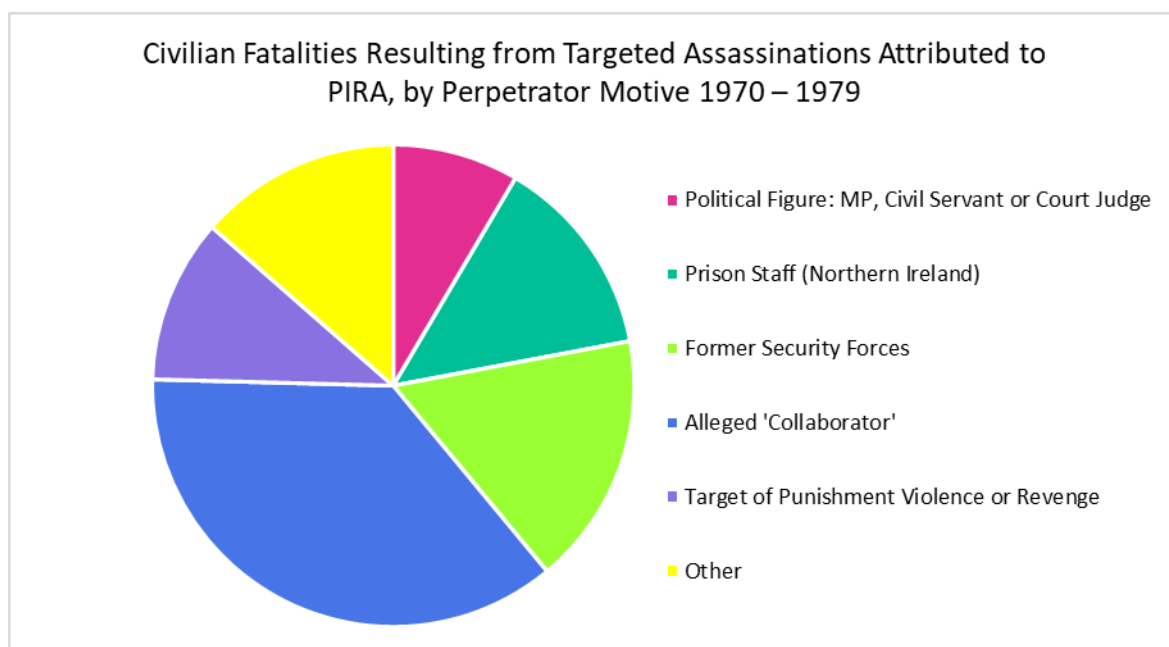


Figure 2.8 Civilian Fatalities Resulting from Targeted Assassinations Attributed to PIRA, by Perpetrator Motive 1970 – 1979.

Source: Kowalski, DPhil Dataset.

Some PIRA volunteers were killed by the PIRA for alleged crimes of collaboration with the security forces during the 1970s (for instance, for acting as undercover agents or informers).³⁴⁷ Ron Dundai estimated that in total the PIRA killed approximately 70 of their own members as informers during the conflict (10 of whom were disappeared).³⁴⁸ The first was killed in January 1971, the last in 1994, and the executions were carried out at a steady pace.

Informers could and did cause the PIRA major setbacks by foiling plots to import arms, disrupting operations, setting ambushes to facilitate the arrest of volunteers, or assisting the prosecution case against them.³⁴⁹ By contrast, the civilians who the PIRA killed or injured for their alleged 'collaboration' or 'anti-social behaviour', do not appear to have engaged in activity that would have posed a significant tangible threat to the PIRA. At best, the threat that collaborators and criminals posed to the PIRA appears to have been at best, reputational. The fact that the PIRA decided to kill or brutally punish such people indicates that the purpose of this element of the campaign was to remove the immediate threat that they perceived to be posed to their authority. Figures 2.9 and 2.10 reveal that punishment assassinations and non-fatal punishment attacks were a small but consistent feature of the armed struggle. This suggests that the PIRA believed the practice performed an important or at least necessary function. This thesis argues that this function was reputation management, and that the volume and tone of these attacks reveal that the PIRA was

³⁴⁷ See, for example, McKittrick, *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 2076, 2121.

³⁴⁸ Dundai, *Penalty in the Underground*, pp.3, 65-69

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.51-56.

attempting to limit this aspect of their campaign and manage public perceptions of it carefully.

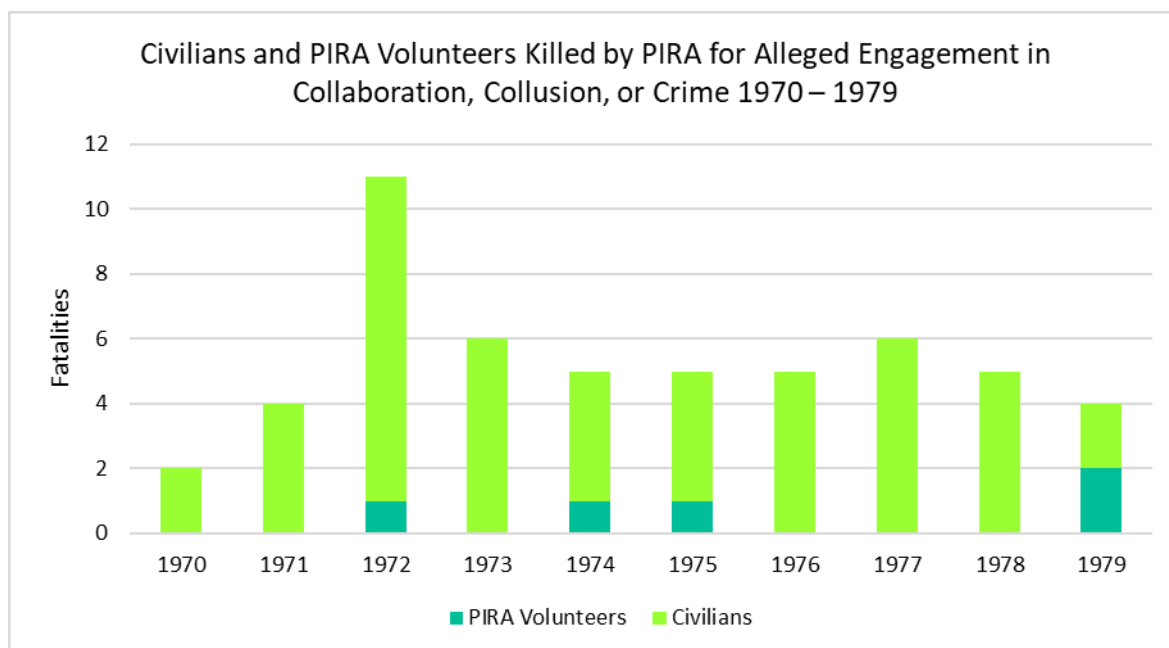


Figure 2.9 Civilians and PIRA Volunteers Killed by PIRA for Alleged Engagement in Collaboration, Collusion, or Crime 1970 – 1979.

Source: Kowalski, DPhil Dataset.

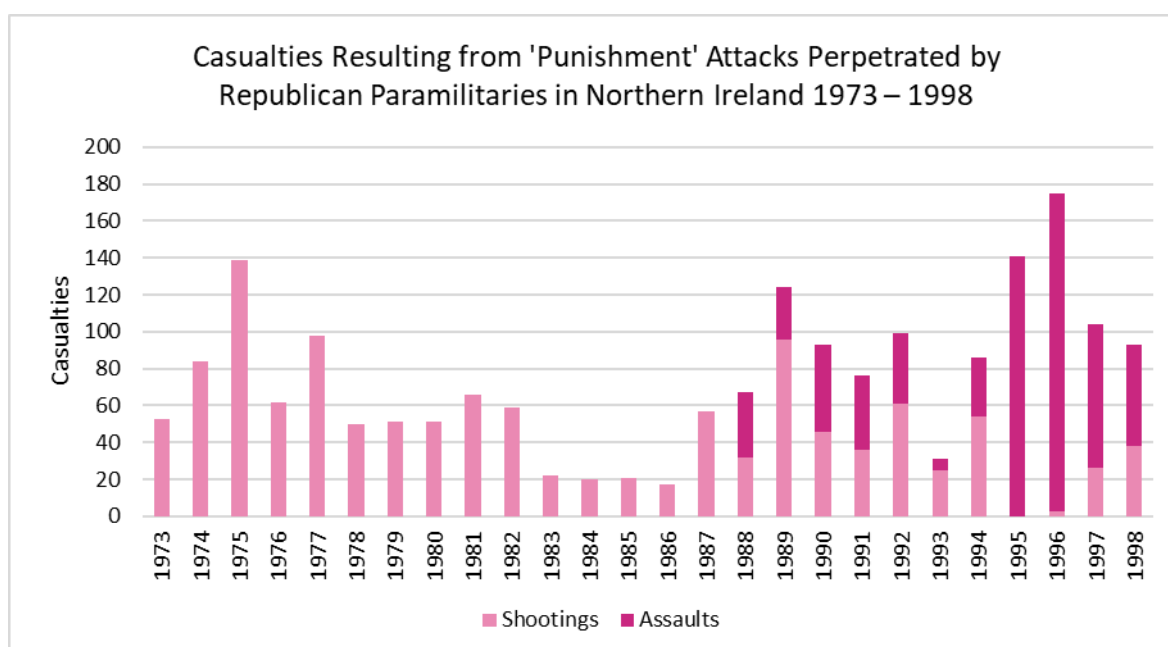


Figure 2.10 Casualties Resulting from 'Punishment' Attacks Perpetrated by Republican Paramilitaries in Northern Ireland 1973 – 1998.

Note: data pertaining to punishment 'assaults' is not available before 1988.

Source: Table NI-SEC-11: Casualties (numbers) as a result of paramilitary 'punishment' attacks in Northern Ireland, 1973-2009, CAIN, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ni/security/security.htm>, (25/11/2022).

Ron Dundai found that informers were loathed in and outside of the PIRA, and the fact that the hostility could extend to the families of informers meant that there was less reason for the PIRA to fear that there would be a backlash to their execution.³⁵⁰ Still, Dundai's research reveals that the PIRA's campaign against informers was influenced and limited by the organisations concerns regarding public opinion or internecine contests.³⁵¹

The PIRA claimed that their punishment and policing activities were legitimate on account of their being the Provisional government of the 'republic'.³⁵² There is some evidence to suggest that there was a degree of local tolerance of (or appetite for) punishment violence.³⁵³ Brendan O'Leary's has argued that punishment violence was a 'demand and supply problem' for the PIRA:

Rough justice was locally demanded for alleged offenders and petty criminals within nationalist working-class communities, where calling on the services of the police, especially the unreformed RUC, was unimaginable – not least because police officers were often unwilling to show up because they feared that they might be set up and shot. The [P]IRA leaders in Belfast felt it necessary to meet some of this demand.³⁵⁴

Max Abrahms notes the PIRA issued statements to explain what 'crime' a civilian victim had allegedly committed in a bid to justify the attack or at least lessen the reputational costs of taking the action.³⁵⁵ The PIRA's statements regarding the alleged justification for their attacks against alleged collaborators or criminals were less likely to transform public opinion

³⁵⁰ Dundai, *Penalty in the Underground*, pp.59-63.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp.3, 65-69.

³⁵² Mulholland, *Short Introduction*, p.75.

³⁵³ Dundai, *Penalty in the Underground*, pp.59-63.

³⁵⁴ O'Leary, *A Treatise: Volume I*, p.57.

³⁵⁵ Abrahms, *Rules for Rebels*, pp.189-190.

in the PIRA's favour than their claims regarding suspected informers. For these reasons the PIRA's campaign against traitors, collaborators and criminals needed to be minimised and signposted.

The PIRA sought to reduce the number of instances that they onboarded the reputational risk of punishing alleged informers, collaborators, and criminals by publishing general notices of warning were published in the news media, leaflets and posters (made by the PIRA) to deter civilians from engaging in activity that the PIRA deemed to be collaboration. A PIRA warning to civilians against selling supplies to the military was printed in the *Irish News* on 16 November 1974:

Let us remind these business people that the inmates in our prisons are starving and we will not tolerate local traders supplying foodstuffs to British soldiers so that they can continue their campaign of harassment and devastation in the area. No further warning will be given but action will be swift and sure.³⁵⁶

A poster made by the PIRA in the 1970s warned civilians against sharing information that could potentially thwart their activities. It featured a gun-wielding and balaclava-clad PIRA volunteer next to large text which read: 'Loose talk costs lives. In taxis. On the phone. In clubs and bars. At football matches. At home with friends. Anywhere! Whatever you say – say nothing'.³⁵⁷

The PIRA also served warnings by example. Often the PIRA's attacks against civilians who were labelled collaborators by the organisation took on a very public and grisly character.

³⁵⁶ *Irish News*, 16 November 1974, p.1.

³⁵⁷ Mulholland, *Short Introduction*, 'figure.8', p.181.

Joanne Mathers was assassinated in 1981 for 'working' for the British government against the warnings of the PIRA, by means of collecting census forms.³⁵⁸ Mather's killer is said to walked up to and shot her in plain view of others early in the evening of 7 April 1971, and made a point of collecting the census forms that had been in her possession before they made their escape.³⁵⁹

The bodies of the individuals whom the PIRA had interrogated and killed for their allegedly having colluded with the security forces were discarded – generally in the countryside and usually blindfolded, hands bound behind their back, and sometimes lacking clothes.³⁶⁰

Punishment violence was also sometimes meted out in public, and the victim's humiliation could be prolonged when the PIRA decided to leave their injured victims bound to unmovable objects in a public space or label them with a sign that announced the nature of the (alleged) crimes that had motivated the attack. Published photographs of the incidents from this period include: an undated image of two young girls that have had their heads forcibly shaved, been tied to a lamppost and labelled with a sign that reads 'Self Confessed Touts' hung around their necks;³⁶¹ a picture of a 19-year-old female who has had her hair shorn, been tarred and feathered, and tied to a lamppost in Derry in 1971 for allegedly

³⁵⁸ See McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 2299; Knox, *The Killing*, p.108. David Beresford, *Ten Men Dead* (London, 1994), p.106; 'The census day murders that shocked all sections', *Belfast Telegraph*, 17 February 1982, p.11.

³⁵⁹ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 2299.

³⁶⁰ For examples, see images of the recently deceased volunteers John McNulty, Paddy Flood and John Dignam in Harnden, *Bandit Country*, (photo insert), pp.372-373.

³⁶¹ 'Victims of IRA Punishment', (Photograph), Charles Messenger, *Northern Ireland The Troubles* (New York, 1985), p.127.

‘falling in love’ with a soldier;³⁶² and a photograph of a person who had a layer of tar and feathers poured on their head that was so thick that their face is entirely obscured.³⁶³

The way these individuals were assaulted or killed was clearly punishing. It seems reasonable to presume that the character of these acts was designed to fulfil a second, broader purpose of generating a deterrence affect: by making a public spectacle of the victims to serve as a warning to others of the grisly consequences of their (alleged) actions. In this sense, we can understand that the reason the PIRA applied violence which was seemingly so highly disproportionate to the so-called crime, was to keep minimise this element of their campaign: for a widespread program of assassination and brutality against the civilian population would not be a good way to maintain support for the PIRA, or the republican cause.

The PIRA was also careful about how they managed public perceptions about the incidents when they did assassinate suspected informers and alleged collaborators. For example, the PIRA employed their own version of judicial due process before assassinating suspected informers – which included interrogations and required evidence to produce a guilty verdict – and offered amnesties and leniency to other volunteers. Dundai’s work reveals that the PIRA was more lenient than might be expected – killing only a minority of those who were suspected of or admitted to informing.³⁶⁴ These mechanisms were important for the PIRA’s

³⁶² ‘Justice IRA Style’, (Photograph, 9 November 1971), Tony Geraghty, *The Irish War: A Military History of a Domestic Conflict* (London, 2000), pp.162-163.

³⁶³ ‘An example of IRA Justice’, (Photograph), Dewar, *The British Army*, p.150.

³⁶⁴ Dundai, *Penalty in the Underground*, pp.3, 65-69.

internal and external relations: they provided a sense that the organisation employed a rigorous process, and were accepting of the reality that volunteers who agreed to inform against the organisation sometimes did so only after they had been placed under a significant degree of pressure.³⁶⁵ The amnesties also offered the PIRA scope to reduce the amount of attention that was drawn to instances of successful infiltration – volunteers who willingly admitted to having informed could be exiled quietly with plausible cover stories offered to their friends and family.³⁶⁶

The PIRA also endeavoured to manage their campaign against collaborators by being selective about their targets and responsive to public reaction. The PIRA's definition of a collaborator certainly fluctuated; sometimes whole groups of peoples could fall in and out of the organisation's definition entirely. Some of the later additions to the list went on to become actively targeted by the PIRA and fatalities occurred as a result. The timing of the PIRA's claims and actions in relation to both, reveals the significant role that public opinion played in this element of the campaign.

³⁶⁵ Ibid., 65-69.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

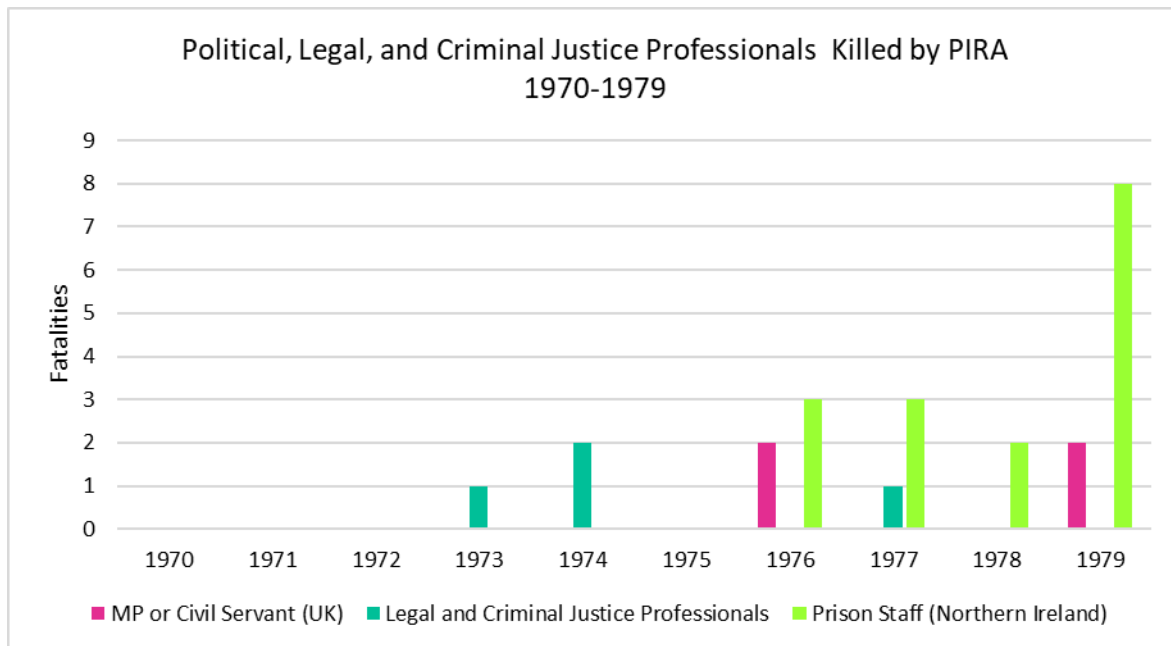


Figure 2.11 Political, Legal and Criminal Justice Professionals Killed by PIRA 1970-1979.
Source: Kowalski, DPhil Dataset.

On 7 May 1974 the Provisional IRA declared that they would henceforth consider English politicians as legitimate targets.³⁶⁷ High-profile instances included the attempted assassination of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher at a hotel in Brighton (England) during the British Conservative Party Annual Conference on 12 October 1984, which killed 5 and injured 31 people.³⁶⁸ At first glance, it seems more credible to suggest that the PIRA had not openly claimed that it was their intention to target political figures before this time because it was not likely that they would be able to succeed. Under closer inspection, the timing and tone of the announcement has more to reveal about the PIRA's political motivations.

³⁶⁷ Deutsch and Magowan, *Volume 3*, p.51.

³⁶⁸ Bowyer Bell, *Targets and Tactics*, pp. 36-7.

The PIRA's statement claimed that they had decided to target political figures specifically because of 'the growing campaign of murder of civilians and the British Army's threat to shoot Irish children'.³⁶⁹ The announcement came at a time when loyalist paramilitary groups had been perpetrating an increasing number of assassination attacks that targeted Catholic civilians and were gearing up to protest against the formation of the Northern Ireland Assembly and introduction of power-sharing initiatives under the Sunningdale Agreement.³⁷⁰ The timing and tone of this announcement connects the statement directly with loyalist paramilitary activity and demonstrates the PIRA using violence and rhetoric as a tool for political negotiation and propaganda for, at this critical time, the Catholic minority population in Ireland had a viable non-violent alternative to the PIRA – the constitutional nationalist political party (SLDP). And so, if the PIRA want to bring popular support back towards their orthodox position then it was important to highlight loyalist violence and suggest they were the only antidote to it. The comments of then Taoiseach Liam Cosgrave in the aftermath of the collapse of the Northern Ireland Executive summarises this sentiment:

This great experiment in co-operation has been wrecked by deliberate misrepresentation of its purpose on the one hand and by the continuance of violence on the other. As we warned it would, the campaign of the IRA had provoked a massive sectarian backlash. This has undermined the only kind of solution that can bring peace to Northern Ireland.³⁷¹

³⁶⁹ Deutsch and Magowan, *Volume 3*, p.51.

³⁷⁰ For examples of assassinations by loyalist paramilitaries at this time see McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 1078, 1079, 1080, 1081, 1082, 1085, 1087, 1088. On 8 May 1974 (the following day) the UDA issued a statement that confirmed its support of the United Ulster Unionist Council (UUUC) and the policy of opposing the power-sharing initiatives introduced under the Sunningdale Agreement. On 15 May the Ulster Workers Council Strike commenced and became instrumental in the eventual decision to prorogue the Assembly at the end of the month.

³⁷¹ Deutsch and Magowan, *Volume 3*, p.80.

Another case in point is that prison officers and prison administrative staff began to be included in the PIRA's definition of security-force personnel and were, therefore, actively targeted from the mid-1970s onwards. The first prison officer to be killed during the Troubles was Patrick Dillon in a drive-by shooting attack outside his home in Loughmacrory Park, Mountfield Road near Omagh (Co. Tyrone) on 8 April 1976.³⁷² The PIRA killed 19 Prison officers, two former Prison officers, one Prison Lecturer and one Prison nursing officer between 1976 and 1989. The majority were Protestant (18 of 23) and assassinated while off-duty by IRA gunmen (21 of 23 were killed with firearms). There is evidence to suggest that the PIRA failed to kill all of the prison officers that they targeted (on or off-duty). For example, three attacks in Belfast on 4 January 1978: two non-fatal incidents when victim operated IEDs attached to personal vehicles exploded, and an attempted ambush of a car driven by third prison officer.³⁷³

The PIRA connected their decision to target prison officers with the emergence and escalation of the prison war from 1976 onwards.³⁷⁴ The fact that Patrick Dillon was killed just one month after it was announced that special category status would no longer be awarded to paramilitary prisoner suggests that the claim is not without foundation. However, the fact that there is evidence to suggest that the group claimed that prison staff were PIRA targets prior to this time does undermines the claim somewhat. The *Belfast Telegraph* noted that the PIRA had been threatening prison officers for three years before they killed Patrick Dillon.

³⁷² McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 1664.

³⁷³ January 1978 in 'NIO Summary 1977-1978', TNA, CJ 4/2297.

³⁷⁴ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 1664.

Over the past three years the Provisional IRA have stated that prison officers and their families were being regarded as “legitimate targets”. Less than a month ago the IRA’s Belfast brigade issued a statement to this effect.³⁷⁵

The initial statement that is being referenced here was issued on 4 June 1973, following the controversial death of PIRA volunteer Patrick Crawford in the Maze prison under suspicious circumstances the previous day.³⁷⁶ It stated that the Provisional IRA in Belfast had warned that prison officers and their families would now be regarded as legitimate targets. It explained that the PIRA had been considering what revenge action could be taken over prison conditions and the treatment of internees for some time. It continued:

Loath as we are to take this decision, we cannot stand by while Irish men and women are being ill-treated and abused in English concentration camps.³⁷⁷

It continued: ‘Until the prisoner’s demands are met, and conditions changed radically, this warning will remain effective.’ In this sense, we might read the PIRA’s actions as being considered previously, but only taken at the moment when they believed they had a significantly compelling justification to do so. Certainly, they would have had more confidence in this regard by 1976 for the matter of prison conditions and the treatment of prisoners was being scrutinised by the European Commission on Human Rights, and widely publicised by the news media and work of non-profit organisations including Amnesty International. The fact that Merlyn Rees (then secretary of state for Northern Ireland) criticised the attack using language which framed the assault as crime, as opposed to a

³⁷⁵ Rees condemns Omagh Murder, *The Belfast Telegraph*, 9 April 1976, p.3.

³⁷⁶ ‘Firemen meet to discuss threats’, *Belfast Telegraph*, 11 October 1972, p.4; Tom Murtagh, *The Maze Prison: A Hidden Story of Chaos, Anarchy and Politics* (Hampshire, 2018), pp.126-128.

³⁷⁷ ‘IRA says prison staff are “targets”’, *Birmingham Daily Post*, 5 June 1973, p.1.

politically motivated assassination as the PIRA attested, demonstrates that the government was keen to rebuff this claim:

It was a 'tragic example of the blind gangsterism of those who use violence and murder against the community.'³⁷⁸

Negative public response seems to have underpinned the PIRA's decision to move away from (or not actually begin to pursue) selecting the anti-personnel targets they announced at various points to be included on their list of so-called legitimate targets. Cases in point include Fire Fighters (from October 1972), the civilian family members of security force personnel (from August 1973), and high-profile businessmen (spring 1977). All three cases (outlined below) demonstrate that the PIRA was willing to move away from selecting certain targets when it became apparent that there was a particularly negative response from the public.

The Irish Republican Publicity Bureau in Dublin issued a statement on 10 October 1972 to warn that members of the Fire service were at risk of becoming PIRA targets:

Members of the fire service in the Six Counties have been observed assisting British Army personnel recovering military vehicles after landmine attacks. If this practice continues, members of the fire service will be treated as part of the Occupation Forces.³⁷⁹

Fire chiefs were said to be meeting to discuss the threat, and a statement was issued by the Fire Authorities in response the following day. The statement stated that fire fighter's role

³⁷⁸ 'Rees condemns Omagh Murder, *The Belfast Telegraph*, 9 April 1976, p.3.

³⁷⁹ Statement issued by the Irish Republican Publicity Bureau in Dublin, 10 October 1972, quoted in: 'Firemen meet to discuss threats', *Belfast Telegraph*, 11 October 1972, p.4; Deutsch and Magowan, *Volume 2*, p.227.

was to save life and protect property from fire, their policy was to give assistance to all sections of the community, and they had not and would not be involved in the recovery of vehicles belonging to the security forces because they did not have time and were not equipped to do so.³⁸⁰

Fire fighters were certainly placed in danger because of PIRA violence on a regular basis. But there is little evidence to suggest that the PIRA had actively begun to target members of the force as they did the military or police on or after this time. Questions were raised in the media about the significance of gunfire occurring in the vicinity of a fire engine the day after this statement was issued. However, statements issued by representatives of the Belfast Fire Brigade and the 1st battalion Light Infantry unit soon after the fact maintained that, even though gunfire passed in front of a fire engine, there was 'no evidence to suggest the firing was directed against the fire brigade' as opposed to the soldiers.³⁸¹

Some years later, a single member of the fire service sadly lost his life because of PIRA violence: Wesley Orr was killed on 16 November 1978 when an unexpected second explosion occurred at the Ulster Brewery on the Glen Road in West Belfast in the building in which he had entered to begin fighting the fire caused by the initial blast. But there is insufficient evidence to suggest that this event is indicative of the PIRA seeking to fulfil the threat that was issued more than four years earlier.³⁸²

³⁸⁰ 'Firemen meet to discuss threats', *Belfast Telegraph*, 11 October 1972, p.4.

³⁸¹ 'Shots thwart firemen', *Belfast Telegraph*, 11 October 1972, pp.1,4.

³⁸² McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 2062.

Public criticism – of fear of it – may well explain the absence of assassination attempts against the lives of firefighters after they were supposedly at risk (from October 1972 onwards).³⁸³ It is also possible that wider implications for civilian safety dawned on the PIRA after the fact. In any case, the fact that the PIRA did not offer any form of public retraction could be read as indicative of the leaderships desire to avoid actions that presented the organisation as either weak or foolish.

The PIRA essentially claimed that the (civilian) family members of security force personnel were legitimate targets in 1973 following their 9 August 1973 bombing attack on the family quarters of Lisanelly barracks in Omagh.³⁸⁴ In claiming responsibility for the attack, which caused substantial material damage and non-fatal injuries to the wives and children of the soldiers stationed there, the Mid-Ulster PIRA Brigade stated that that the married quarters of the army were legitimate targets and ‘would be attacked without warning’.³⁸⁵ The statement, on this occasion, was referring to an action that they had just demonstrated a willingness to take. The PIRA did attack many more army and police barracks over the years, but it would appear that on all subsequent occasions that it was headquarters, single-male quarters or other areas within the compounds that were targeted.³⁸⁶ The fact that the PIRA’s claim that the family living quarters of military barracks were legitimate targets in August 1973 was reported to have ‘earned widespread condemnation from many sources’ is

³⁸³ Deutsch and Magowan, *Volume 2*, p.227.

³⁸⁴ 11 - 17 August 1973 in ‘NIO Summary 1973’, TNA, CJ 4/1024; 9 August 1973 in ‘HQ3 Diary, August 73’, TNA, WO 305/4216; *Irish News*, 11 August 1973, p.1.

³⁸⁵ *Belfast Telegraph*, 10 August 1973, p.3; ‘Provos start new campaign against Army families’, *Birmingham Daily Post*, Friday 10 August 1973, p.26.

³⁸⁶ Dewar, *The British Army*, p.84.

a reasonable explanation as to why the organisation did not continue to pursue this line of action.³⁸⁷

The PIRA perpetrated a limited series assassination attacks that targeted successful businessman in 1977.³⁸⁸ This included, for example Mr Jeffrey Agate, the managing director of one of Northern Ireland's largest industrial establishments, the DuPont factory at Maydown (Co. Derry) on 2 February 1977, and James Nicholson, a company executive and journalist from Harrowgate in York, in West Belfast on 15 March 1977.³⁸⁹ The line of argument taken by the PIRA in justification for these attacks generally echoed that of their program of (anti-property) economic targeting: 'Those involved in the management of the economy serve British interests. They represent and maintain economic interests which make the war necessary.'³⁹⁰ Similar justifications are said to have informed the PIRA's decision to kidnap wealthy individuals or their possessions in ultimately unsuccessful attempts to bargain for the release or transfer of PIRA prisoners.³⁹¹ Successful businessmen did not, however, continue to feature in the PIRA's programme of targeted assassinations after this time which is likely due to the widespread condemnation that the killings provoked.³⁹²

³⁸⁷ 11 - 17 August 1973 in 'NIO Summary 1973', TNA, CJ 4/1024.

³⁸⁸ Knox, *The Killing*, pp.161-165.

³⁸⁹ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 1881, 1900. Similar motives may also have been involved in references: 1848, 1890, 1888, 1894, 1943, 1879, 1885, 1935.

³⁹⁰ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 1881.

³⁹¹ Knox, *The Killing*, pp.224-226.

³⁹² 'Tribute to Jeffrey Agate', *Belfast Telegraph*, 5 February 1977, p.1; Bowyer Bell, *Targets and Tactics*, p.60.

Finally, there are a few instances when the PIRA was unwilling to admit that they had killed individuals for anti-social behaviour or alleged engagement in informing against the PIRA until years after the fact. The cases include punishment assassination attacks against youths, women or individuals with learning disabilities;³⁹³ a case when the businessman they had kidnapped for other purposes died in the process of being violently restrained by his captors;³⁹⁴ and the execution of PIRA volunteers turned informers and British agents who had successfully become recruited into the PIRA, or had some success infiltrating them from without or colluding against them with loyalist paramilitaries. On all counts, it would seem reasonable to assume that the reason that the PIRA was unwilling to admit culpability was to conceal signs of internal weakness, or to avoid drawing unwanted public criticism.

The PIRA used different means to deny or conceal their involvement in the death of these individuals. In some cases, the PIRA simply refused to admit that they had been involved. In other cases, they intentionally fostered misinformation. For example, even though the PIRA had announced their plans to disrupt the 1981 census collection in advance, and were widely reported to have assaulted and robbed other census collectors at gun point, PIRA statements alleged that loyalist paramilitaries killed Joanne Mathers in a bid to spoil the chances that Bobby Sands (a PIRA volunteer who was then imprisoned and on hunger strike) would be successful in the forthcoming bi-election:

We believe that the attack is not unconnected with the present by-election in Fermanagh and South Tyrone. We suspect those involved in tonight's killing are

³⁹³ The PIRA denied involvement in the murder of Bernard Teggert (15) until 2004, and only revealed that they had executed and 'disappeared' John McClory (18) Brian McKinne (22) and Danny McIlhone for allegedly misappropriating weapons in March 1999. McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 959, 2020-2021, 2339.

³⁹⁴ Successful businessman Thomas Neidermayer was killed after being kidnapped in 1981 while being restrained by his captors. Knox, *The Killing*, pp.219-223.

frantically attempting discredit the election campaign of hunger striker Bobby Sands.³⁹⁵

The PIRA have also been found to have been complicit in the spreading of misinformation about the death of Thomas Niedermayer – an honorary German Consul and successful businessman they kidnapped in 1981 with the intention of bargaining for the release of PIRA volunteers, Marian and Dolours Price, who were then imprisoned (and on hunger strike) in England.³⁹⁶ The PIRA are not responsible for the total sum of fake news that emerged about the Niedermayer case – which included suggestions that he had been killed by loyalist paramilitaries or an unknown assassin because either he or his wife had been having an affair – but it is clear that they were involved, and that took additional steps to ensure that their contribution to the misdirection was compelling. It is said that those who knew that the PIRA were responsible for killing Niedermayer intentionally selected other volunteers who did not to talk to journalists – so that when they denied that the PIRA had been involved in the case, their testimony seemed authentic.

In a small number of cases (including that of Thomas Niedermayer) the PIRA also hid bodies the bodies of their victims.³⁹⁷ It would be easy to assume that ‘disappearing’ victims was an easy way out, and perhaps it was. Still, there might be an argument to say that there the decision may not have been taken lightly. The families of those who were disappeared by

³⁹⁵ ‘IRA deny killing census woman shot on doorstep’, *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 8 April 1981, p.5.

³⁹⁶ Knox, *The Killing*, pp.190-194, pp.199.

³⁹⁷ In March 1999 the PIRA admitted disappearing 9 individuals including: Catholic civilians Jean McConville, Columba McVeigh, and Brendan Megraw, PIRA volunteers/informers Seamus Wright, Kevin McKee, and Eamon Molloy, and Republic of Ireland Grenadier Guards Solider Robert Nairac. McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 699, 1511, 2013, 626-627, 1321, 1932.

the PIRA could sometimes suspect their loved ones had been assassinated by the PIRA at an early stage, others were taken in by the lie for a more significant amount of time. All make clear that the absence of proof of their death prolonged the amount of time they clung to hope that they would return, and that the concealment of truth in this regard was a further source of pain.³⁹⁸ The fact that there are now laws in place in the UK that are intended to deter murderers from hiding the bodies of their victims or refusing to identify the locations to the court when convicted, stands testament to the fact that their reactions and experiences are not isolated in this regard.³⁹⁹ The implication is that at least more recently, a court of law has determined that the act of disappearing a person is a further and additional crime (to murder) that is committed against the families of the victims and warrants criminal punishment.

Republican Paramilitary Targets and Internecine Rivalry

Rivalry with other republican groups could shape the tone of the armed struggle and PIRA rhetoric in several different ways. Competition for communal support led rival republican groups to compete. It was common to see groups denouncing their rivals practices in public statements.

The PIRA were keen at the outset, for example, to emphasise how and why they were distinct from the rival faction of the IRA from which they had split (the OIRA). The PIRA

³⁹⁸ Knox, *The Killing*, pp.271-277.

³⁹⁹ Murderers and paedophiles who hold back information on the location of the bodies of their deceased victims could now potentially be refused parole following the passing of the Prisoners (Disclosure of Information About Victims) Act – known commonly as ‘Helen’s Law’ – which received *Royal Assent* on 4 November 2020: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/helen-s-law-receives-royal-assent>, (04/09/2022).

wanted to make clear that they intended to fulfil the role of communal defenders and that their rivals, the OIRA, had failed in this department.⁴⁰⁰ Their very first public statement (issued in December 1969) complained that the pre-split PIRA had failed to 'provide the maximum defence possible of our people in Belfast and other parts of the Six Counties against the forces of British imperialism' in August 1969.⁴⁰¹ Afterward, the PIRA were keen to make clear – to prospective supporters and recruits – that they were better equipped than their predecessors to fulfil this role. The PIRA were very likely responsible for initiating rumours in this regard such as that heard by former member Joe Doherty which was that the 'Provisionals have all the guns, Officials have all the typewriters.'⁴⁰²

The OIRA, likewise, sought to undermine PIRA credibility. In November 1971 the leader of the OIRA, Cathal Goulding, issued a statement that predicted the failure of the Provisional IRA campaign: '[the] physical force phase will pass without any political gains.'⁴⁰³ Peter Krause chronicles later efforts by the OIRA to undermine the PIRA through public statements in his work on rivalry. Examples includes their claim that the PIRA were just 'in it just to fight Prods [Protestants]',⁴⁰⁴ and adopting bombing tactics which were 'irresponsible'.⁴⁰⁵ The OIRA also made attempts to delegitimise the PIRA ceasefire and efforts to 'police' their districts from incident centres during the period by referring to them as the 'Royal Ulster Provisionals' and 'the Queen's own Provos'.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰⁰ Krause, *Rebel Power*, pp.146-147.

⁴⁰¹ Quoted in Mac Stiofáin, *Memoirs*, pp.142-143.

⁴⁰² Quoted in Hanley and Millar, *Lost Revolution*, p.141.

⁴⁰³ 'Provos will be defeated: Goulding', *Belfast Telegraph*, 22 November 1971, p.2.

⁴⁰⁴ Krause, *Rebel Power*, pp.151-154.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.152.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p.158.

Republican rivals also sought to compete through action. When local support or volunteers – existing or prospective new recruits – appeared to be shifting their allegiance from the OIRA to the PIRA, the OIRA began launching attacks to demonstrate their prowess. In the autumn of 1970, the OIRA announced that they would now be undertaking ‘defensive operations’ in the North.⁴⁰⁷ They were responsible for the deaths of several soldiers in 1971 – Robert Bankier was shot by an OIRA sniper in Belfast on 22 May 1971.⁴⁰⁸ John Warnock and Brian Hall were killed in OIRA bombing attacks on 6 September and 4 October 1971.⁴⁰⁹ The OIRA also began to launch prestige attacks against government ministers around this time.⁴¹⁰ Ulster Unionist Stormont Senator John Barnhill was shot by the OIRA during a bomb attack on his home near Strabane, (Co. Tyrone) on 12 December 1971,⁴¹¹ and on 25 February 1972 the OIRA attempted to assassinate John Taylor, then Minister of State for Home Affairs. The OIRA referred to these incidents and claimed to also have inflicted fatalities on the UVF when seeking to raise funds in the United States of America during that year.⁴¹²

In 1972 the PIRA and OIRA made efforts to compete for the title of defenders after Bloody Sunday. April 1972 was an especially busy month. The PIRA issued a statement on 6 April 1972 which claimed that Northern Command had reported that they held a hundred percent support in their stand against the British proposals and that they would, therefore, continue to use violence unless their terms were accepted by the British Government.⁴¹³

⁴⁰⁷ Messenger, *Northern Ireland*, p.85.

⁴⁰⁸ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 73.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, references: 120, 138.

⁴¹⁰ Krause, *Rebel Power*, p.159.

⁴¹¹ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 218.

⁴¹² Krause, *Rebel Power*, pp.151-154.

⁴¹³ Deutsch and Magowan, *Volume 2*, p.168.

The PIRA perpetrated a high and escalating volume of shooting and bombing attacks that month. On Friday 14 April 1972, for example, the PIRA were responsible for more than 30 explosions in a 24-hour period.⁴¹⁴ The OIRA were also active at the time – on 16 April 1972 they shot and killed two soldiers in separate attacks in Derry and Belfast respectively.⁴¹⁵

Amateur paramilitary groups are prone to errors, especially when they seek to increase the scale or scope of their campaign to apply pressure to their opponents. The internecine rivalry between OIRA and PIRA was, however, very likely a contributing factor in both groups making fatal errors in judgement about what would be possible for them to achieve during the spring and summer months in 1972. Some of the OIRA actions in 1972 caused public outrage – and ultimately contributed to their decision to call a ceasefire from 29 May 1972. These included their attack on Aldershot Army barracks with a car bomb on 22 February 1972 which failed to kill any soldiers but instead resulted in the deaths of five female kitchen staff, a priest, and a gardener.⁴¹⁶ Their decision to kidnap and murder Royal Irish Ranger William Best (off-duty) in May 1972 was also misguided.⁴¹⁷ Overexuberance on the part of the PIRA equally blindsided them to the prospective risks their actions could pose. On 21 July 1972 the PIRA were responsible for 20 explosions in just over an hour which resulted in 9 fatalities and 130 casualties being inflicted (mostly among the civilian population) because they had seriously overestimated how many bomb threats the security forces could respond to effectively at the same time – an event which has become known as

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., p.170.

⁴¹⁵ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 337-337.

⁴¹⁶ Gary McGladdery, *The Provisional IRA*, p.3.

⁴¹⁷ Krause, *Rebel Power*, p.159.

Bloody Friday.⁴¹⁸ These events are a clear indication of how internecine rivalry could shape PIRA actions and the consequences thereafter.

Finally, internecine rivalry between republican groups could also boil over into direct attacks on one another, sometimes setting cycles of tit-for-tat violence in motion.⁴¹⁹ The PIRA killed ten members of rival republican paramilitary group OIRA in separate attacks, and a couple of civilians were assassinated during this period of feuding also.⁴²⁰ The majority of the incidents occurred in 1975 during a period of internecine feud.

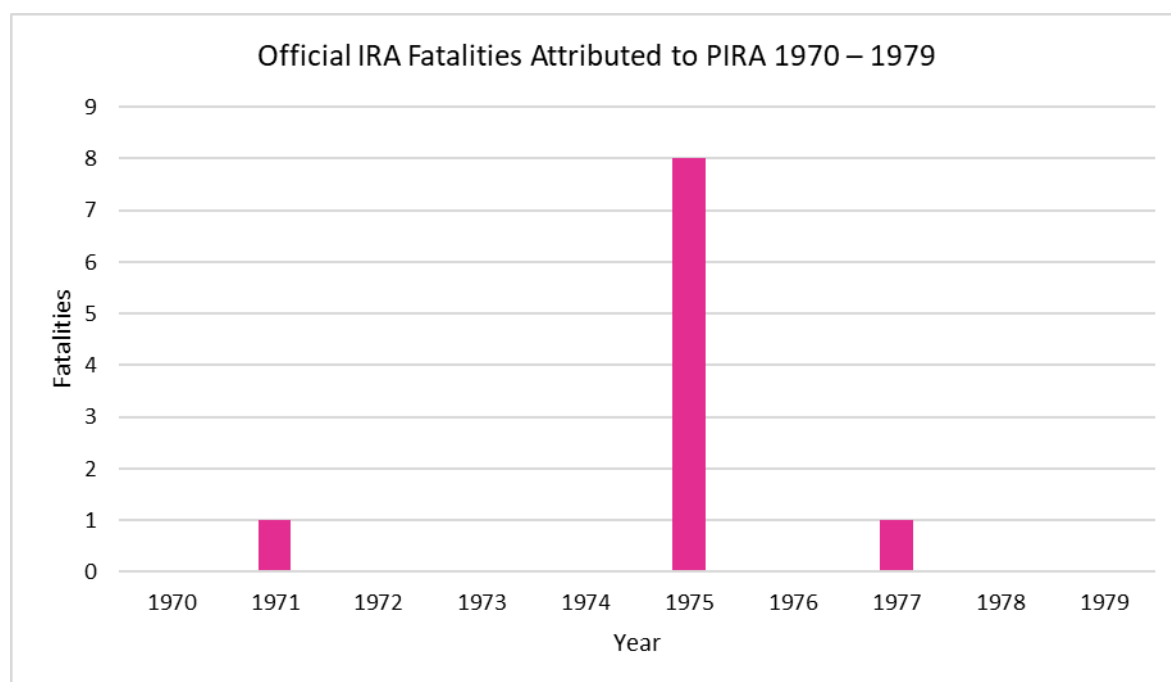


Figure 2.12 Official IRA Fatalities Attributed to PIRA 1970 – 1979.

Source: Kowalski, DPhil Dataset..

⁴¹⁸ Krause, *Rebel Power*, pp.153-154; McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 487-495.

⁴¹⁹ Krause, *Rebel Power*, pp. 152-153, 157-158.

⁴²⁰ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 1425, 1507, 1510, 1512, 1515, 1517, 1519, 1520, 1953, 2172, 411, 1915.

Loyalist Paramilitary Targets, Sectarian Assassinations, and Meta-Conflict

Members of loyalist paramilitaries were not one of categories of people that the PIRA claimed were legitimate targets of assassination. J. Bowyer-Bell provides a clear account as to why this was the case in *IRA: Targets and Tactics* (1990):

The problem ideologically for the [P]IRA is that all of these Irishmen should be not enemies but class national allies – and after two centuries there are still those within the movement who await the conversion of the loyalist working class. As a non-sectarian organisation, albeit nearly entirely Catholic and identified with Irish nationalism, the [P]IRA does not want “Protestant” enemies and so particularly at first, define the loyalists as agents of British imperialism.⁴²¹

However, the PIRA are believed to have killed at least fourteen loyalist paramilitaries during the 1970s in ten separate attacks.⁴²² Most were abducted while they were out walking, beaten, then shot and left for dead in a public street. But a few were shot in ambush attacks on their homes, and indiscriminate shooting tactics were employed to target loyalist paramilitaries on two occasions and civilians were injured or killed as a result. The PIRA targeted UVF member William Henry Corrigan outside of his home at Meadowview Drive in Annaghmore (Co. Armagh) on 13 October 1976 as he and his son, Leslie, returned from visiting his mother in Moy – fatally wounding the teenager who passed away on 25 October.⁴²³ On 27 February 1976 PIRA gunmen opened fire on four men standing outside of Victor's Bar at Walnut Place (Donegall Pass, South Belfast) – killing the security guard, UVF member Kenneth Leneghan, and injuring all of the other men he had been standing with in the process.⁴²⁴

⁴²¹ Bowyer Bell, *Targets and Tactics*, p.32-33.

⁴²² See for instance McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 440, 560, 742, 1408, 1494, 1633, 1639, 1705, 1725, 1817.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 1817, 1824.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*, reference: 1633.

This data suggests that this is an extremely limited aspect of the armed struggle, and one which was acutely linked to loyalist paramilitary activities. Figures 2.13 and 2.14 demonstrate the coincidence of these assassinations with the violence that was perpetrated by loyalist paramilitary groups: all occurred primarily in the mid-1970s when the PIRA was engaged in clashes with these loyalist paramilitary groups following the resurgence in their activities.

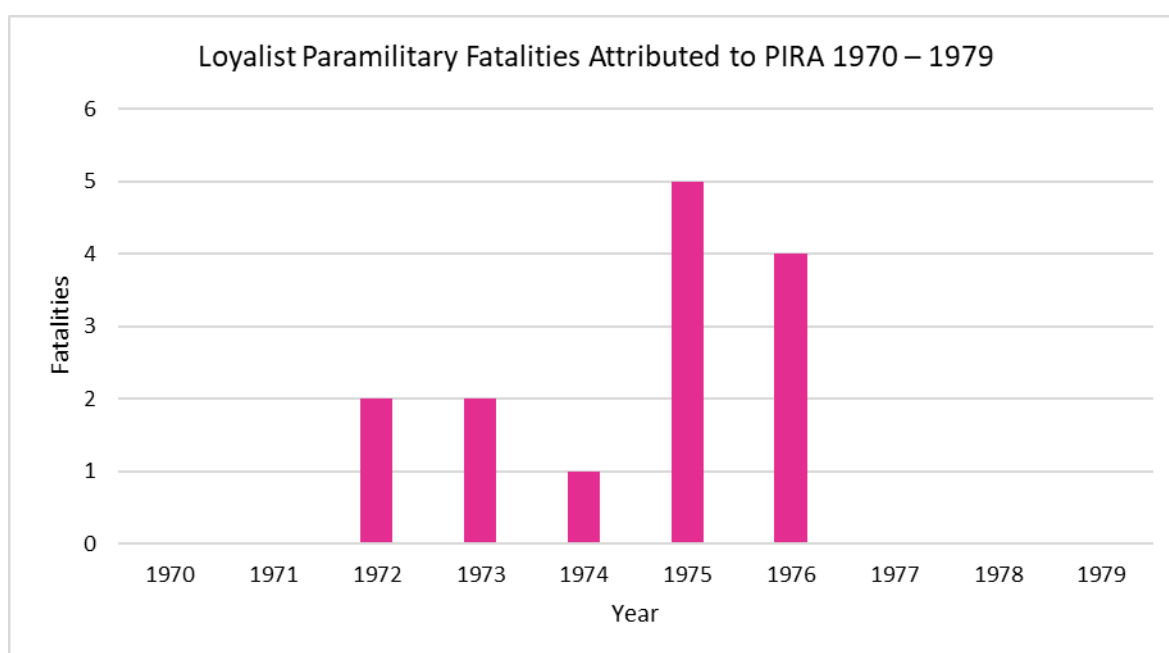


Figure 2.13 Loyalist Paramilitary Fatalities Attributed to PIRA 1970 – 1979.
Source: Kowalski, DPhil Dataset.

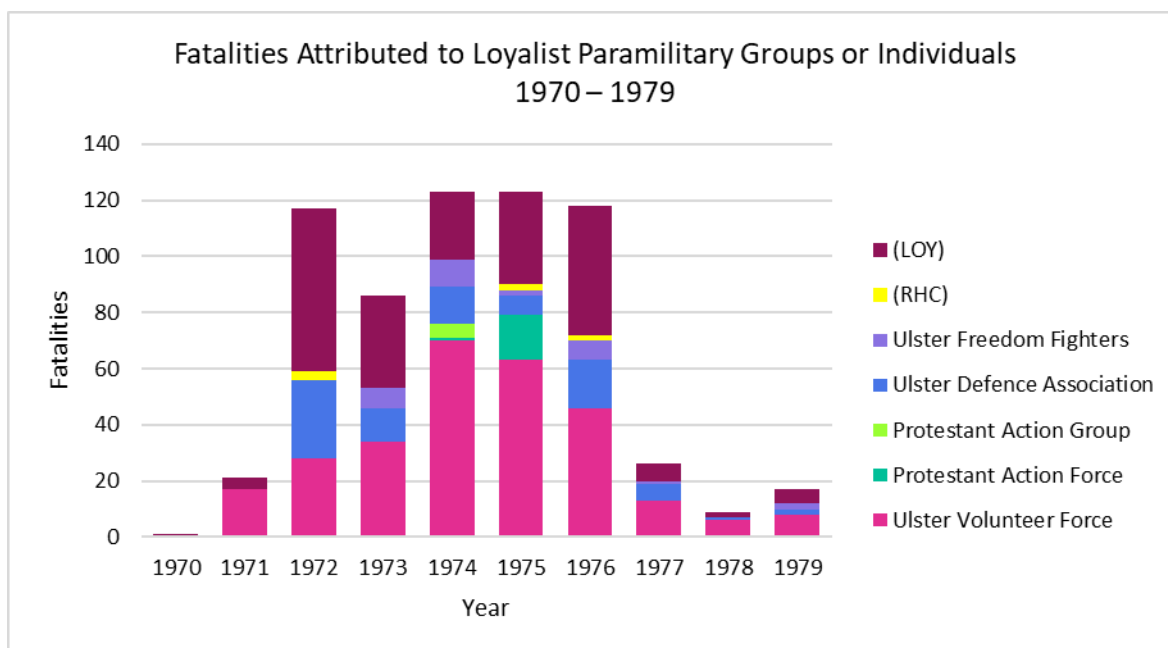


Figure 2.14 Fatalities Attributed to Loyalist Paramilitary Groups or Individuals 1970 – 1979.

Sources: Adapted from: "Organisation" by "Year", in Malcom Sutton, An Index of Deaths from the Conflict in Ireland, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/cgi-bin/tab2.pl>, (30/07/2022).

The armed struggle could be connected more acutely with loyalist paramilitary activity in terms of the targets and tactics adopted by each party. For example, the PIRA's decision to target security-force personnel when they were off-duty, was a principal source of aggravation for loyalist paramilitaries. The UDR were the most common target for off-duty assassination attacks at the hands of the PIRA. This element of the PIRA campaign was often met with a violent response (or backlash) from various loyalist paramilitary groups whose preferred method of reciprocation was to assassinate Catholic civilians. The fact this backlash put pressure on the PIRA is evident in their subsequent actions.

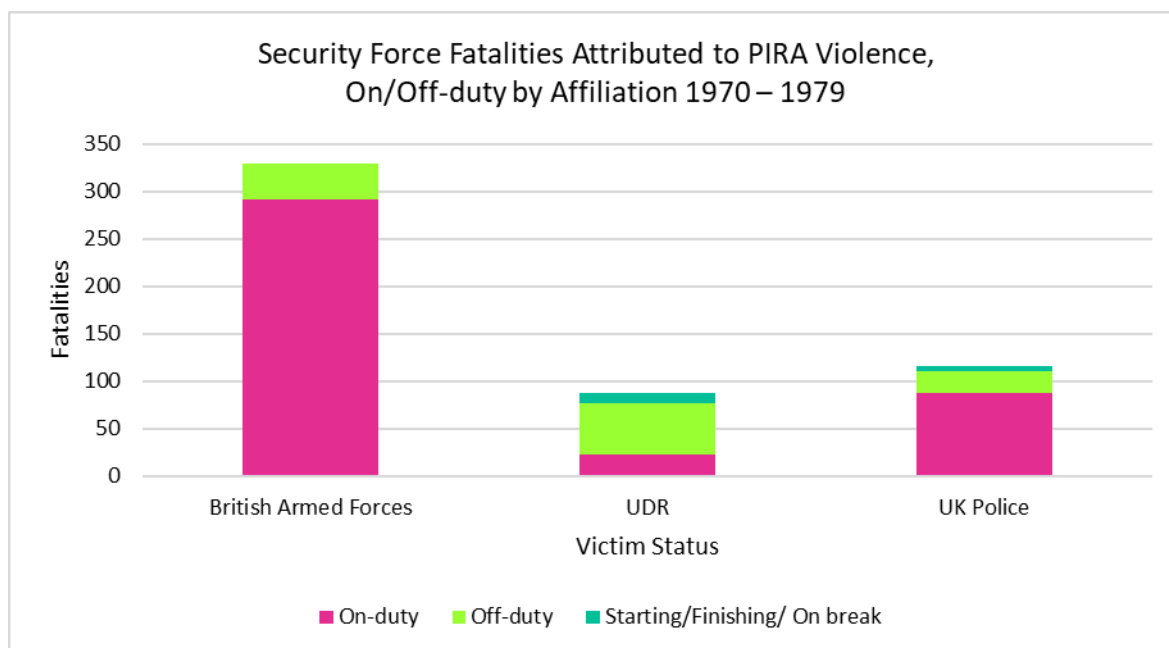


Figure 2.15 Security Force Fatalities Attributed to PIRA Violence, On/Off-duty by Affiliation 1970 – 1979.
Source: Kowalski, DPhil Dataset.

On 29 January 1974 it was reported that the PIRA Army Council had issued an instruction to suspend the shooting of off-duty members of the UDR.⁴²⁵ In response the UVF issued a statement in Belfast to urge all loyalist paramilitary groups to halt sectarian assassinations in the city. Less than two years later, however, the PIRA was to make a U-turn on this policy. On 16 November 1976 the PIRA announced that ‘in the weeks ahead attacks on the UDR both on and off duty will be stepped up’ after it had been revealed by the Army Minister, Mr. Robert Brown, that 13 members of the UDR had been convicted of serious offences (including murder and manslaughter) since 1972, and that a further four UDR were facing separate charges of murder, manslaughter, assault and armed robbery at that time.⁴²⁶ The full statement explained that, in the PIRA’s view, the UDR’s activity was connected with loyalist paramilitaries:

⁴²⁵ 19 January – 1 February 1974 in ‘NIO Summary 1974-1975’, TNA, CJ 4/1787.

⁴²⁶ ‘Serious crime and the UDR’, *Belfast Telegraph*, 17 November 1976, p.4; ‘UDR REPORT’, *Belfast Telegraph*, 23 December 1976, p.3; *Fortnight*, No. 139 (Dec 1976), p.27.

The Provisional IRA in North Armagh admits responsibility for Monday night's ambush on a UDR patrol in the centre of Lurgan in which one UDR man was shot dead and another injured. Recent court cases have at last exposed the UDR as part and parcel of the loyalist murder gangs which have accounted for numerous sectarian killings. Their presence will not be tolerated in any republican areas of Northern Ireland.⁴²⁷

The fact that the PIRA's 1974 cessation of off-duty assassinations claim was reciprocated by the UVF, their subsequent announcement that they were resuming the practice in 1976 was based on allegations that the UDR were in collusion with loyalist paramilitaries, and the 13 attacks that occurred in the intervening period occurred only after a highly salient example of precisely that – the Miami Showband Massacre of 31 July 1975 which involved both UVF and UDR members – shows quite how intrinsically connected these elements of the conflict were.⁴²⁸

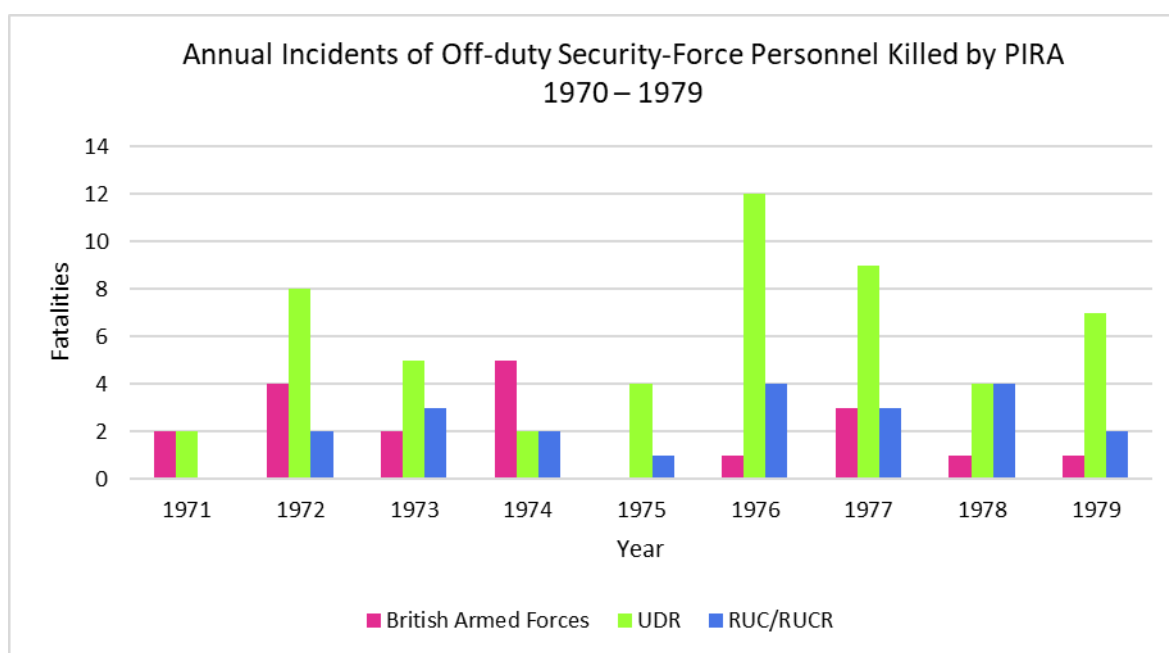


Figure 2.16 Annual Incidents of Off-duty Security-Force Personnel Killed by PIRA 1970 – 1979.

Source: Kowalski, DPhil Dataset.

⁴²⁷ 'IRA Warns UDR of Further Attacks', *Belfast Telegraph*, 17 November 1976, p.4.

⁴²⁸ 14 UDR members were killed off-duty between 3 June 1975 and 11 November 1976. McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 1387, 1450, 1452, 1514, 1589, 1632, 1655, 1656, 1676, 1766, 1825, 1828, 1839, 1841.

The fact that the PIRA responded to the 'loyalist backlash' with a programme of sectarian assassination attacks of their own (against Protestant civilians), is further evidence that this was the case; and the historiographical debate about the role of sectarianism in the PIRA campaign highlights a critical connection between the two.

In addition to targeting non-combatants for their alleged 'collaboration', to a limited extent, the PIRA can be seen to have carried out sectarian assassinations: the killing of individuals targeted on the basis of their known or presumed religious or 'ethnic' affiliation. Different conclusions about the type of incidents that can or should be classified as sectarian have been reached by scholars. However, it would be fair to say that there is agreement over the minimum application of the terminology to describe incidents when the PIRA intentionally target protestant civilians.⁴²⁹ These attacks involved the intentional taking of life. As such, they like other targeted assassinations attacks, and can and should be differentiated from other civilian fatalities in the data and data-analyses.

Sources of evidence relating to such incidents can be scarce or opaque, especially when it comes to revealing the identity and motive of the perpetrator(s) responsible.⁴³⁰ The sources suggest that the PIRA were responsible for that least 68 fatalities that fall inside this category during the 1970s and are at least implicated in a further 18 cases. A further 17

⁴²⁹ See, for example, Henry Patterson, 'Sectarianism Revisited: The Provisional IRA Campaign in a Border Region of Northern Ireland', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 22/3, (2010), pp.337-356; Matthew Lewis and Shaun McDaid, 'Bosnia on the Border? Republican Violence in Northern Ireland During the 1920s and 1970s' *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 29/4, (2017), pp.635- 655; Rachel Caroline Kowalski, 'The role of sectarianism in the Provisional IRA campaign, 1969–1997', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 30/4, (2018), pp.658-683.

⁴³⁰ See for instance McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 1709-10, 1268, 1743.

individuals were killed in similar circumstances – but the sources have either failed to confirm the identity of the perpetrator or only provided some level of indication that republican paramilitaries were involved. Whether or not we include these cases, the data suggests that the sectarian assassination element of the PIRA campaign was limited proportionally, temporally, and spatially. It also provides some level of insight as to why, when and where the PIRA's decided to pursue a programme of sectarian assassinations.

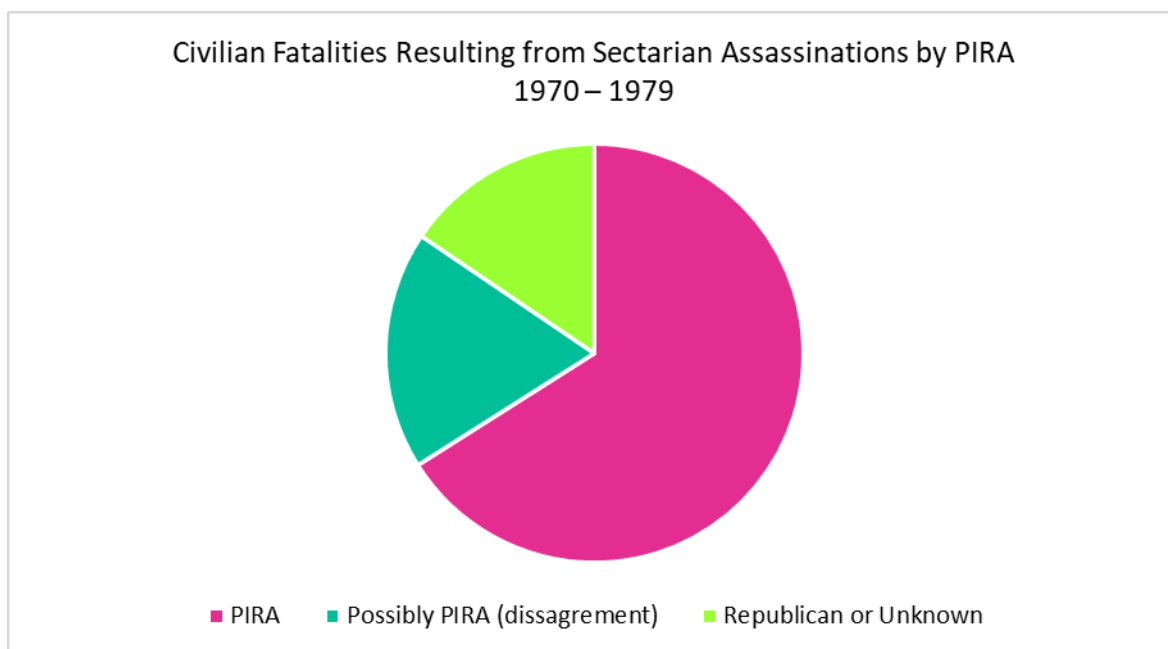


Figure 2.17 Civilian Fatalities Resulting from Sectarian Assassinations by PIRA 1970 – 1979.

Source: Kowalski, DPhil Dataset.

Several academic papers have concluded that that the small volume of sectarian assassinations that were perpetrated by the PIRA were almost exclusively motivated by, and intended to serve as a direct reprisal for loyalist paramilitary attacks against Catholic

civilians.⁴³¹ Moreover, the tactic was used strategically in a bid to deter loyalist paramilitaries from continuing to take this line of action, and in a more general sense, the prospect of loyalist paramilitaries escalating their campaign against civilians served as an effective deterrent against any wider engagement sectarian assassinations on the part of the PIRA. The data supports this view. Figure 2.18 demonstrates that the annual rise and fall in sectarian assassinations perpetrated by the PIRA coincides with the annual volume of assassinations perpetrated by loyalist paramilitary groups (indicated by the blue line) – both were at their peak in the mid- 1970s.

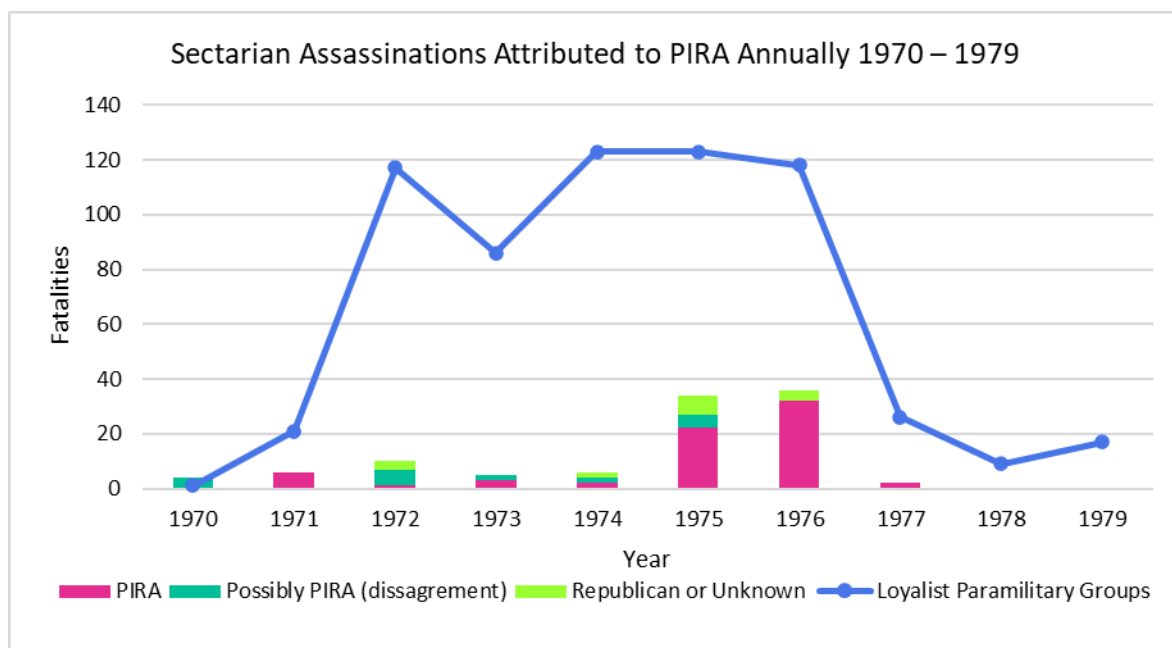


Figure 2.18 Sectarian Assassinations Attributed to PIRA Annually 1970 – 1979.

Source: Kowalski, DPhil Dataset.

⁴³¹ Bowyer Bell, *Targets and Tactics*, pp.32-33; Frampton, 'The Moral Parameters'; Patterson, 'Sectarianism Revisited', pp.337-356; Kowalski, 'The Role of Sectarianism,' pp.658-683; White, 'An Assessment', pp.22-28.

The data reveals that the PIRA's campaign of sectarian assassinations was also a somewhat limited phenomenon, regionally.

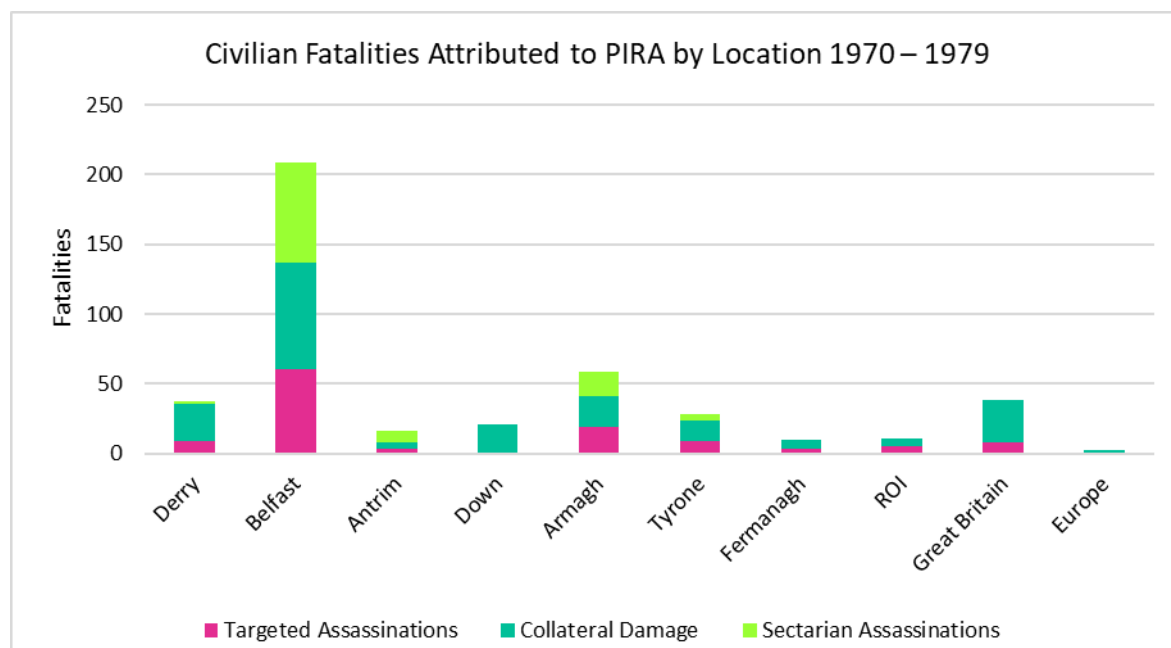


Figure 2.19 Civilian Fatalities Attributed to PIRA by Location 1970 – 1979.
Source: Kowalski, DPhil Dataset.

Data collected by the Northern Ireland Office for the purposes of assessing the situation in the mid-1970s includes statistics of monthly totals of shooting attacks which were believed to be sectarian assassinations carried out by paramilitary groups on either side of the contest.

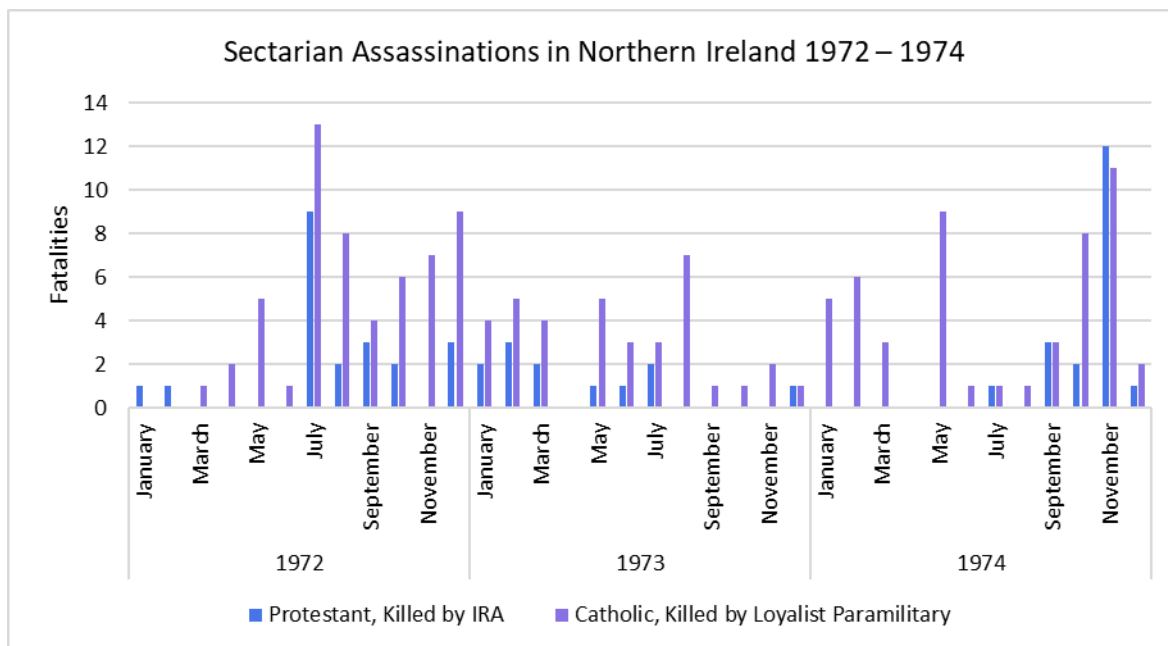


Figure 2.20 Sectarian Assassinations in Northern Ireland 1972 – 1974.

Note: the source notes that the data only includes shooting incidents and that 'Responsibility for each murder has been adduced from evidence, in intelligence or the circumstances surround the death. In many cases it is only tentative.'

Sources: J B Bourn, NIO, 'Appendix A1: Factional and Sectarian Murders 1972 - 1975' in 'Information to Posts Abroad Concerning Sectarian Assassinations', 29 July 1975, TNA, CJ4/1156

The monthly totals recorded from January 1972 to December 1974 indicates that the volume of Protestants killed by the PIRA were far outweighed by the volume of Catholics who were killed by loyalist paramilitaries, and that the PIRA was more likely to engage in reciprocal attacks when the volume of violence that was perpetrated by loyalist paramilitaries was at an elevated or increasing rate. By contrast, data concerning the first few months of 1976 indicates that similar totals were believed to have been perpetrated by either side. This suggest that the PIRA were willing to escalate sectarian assassination attacks to match or exceed those perpetrated by loyalists when this battle was reaching a peak in early 1976.

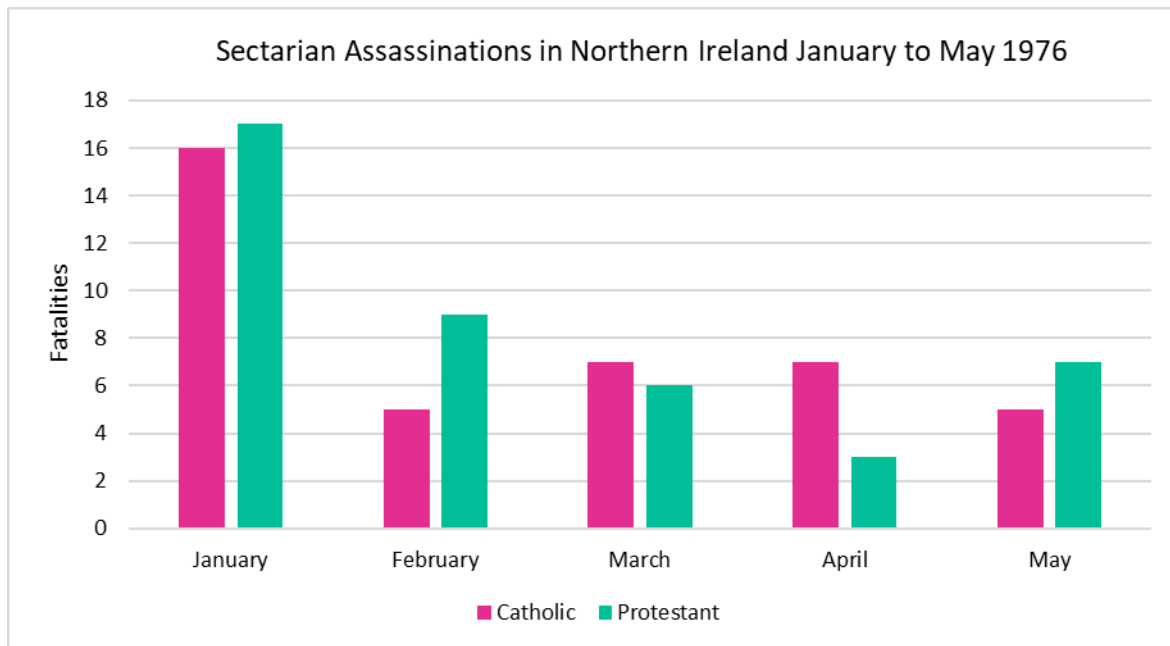


Figure 2.21 Sectarian Assassinations in Northern Ireland January to May 1976.

Sources: Pattern of Fatal Casualties in Northern Ireland, 1976 - 26 May 1976' in Department of the Taoiseach 'Cross Border Terrorism', Briefing Document prepared for a meeting between G. FitzGerald, then Irish Foreign Minister, and M. Rees, then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on 28 May 1976, [27 May 1976], NAI Public Records on CAIN, reference: TSCH 2006/133/676, https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/nai/1976/nai_TSCH-2006-133-676_1976-05-27a.pdf, (22/03/2022).

Qualitative evidence also supports this interpretation of events. When examine cases of sectarian assassinations that occurred in the period 1973-1975 we find characteristics that suggest the PIRA was attempting to reciprocate for, or in some cases replicate exactly, the actions taken by loyalist paramilitaries which had caused a recent or acute sense of outrage in the nationalist community. For example, on 23 November 1974 the PIRA shot and killed 17-year-old filling station attendant Heather Thompson and 24-year-old garage manager John McClean (both Protestants) while there were working at the Eldenderry filling station on the Crumlin Road in North Belfast.⁴³² The day prior to this, the UDA shot and killed 20-

⁴³² McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 1268-1269.

year-old (Catholic) filling station attendant Geraldine Macklin at the People's filling station in West Belfast, and two other Catholic males in North Belfast.⁴³³

By contrast, in January 1976 we get a sense that the PIRA was attempting to respond to loyalist attacks on Catholic civilian families with disproportionate force in January 1976. On 4 January 1976 five Catholics with no connections to the conflict were shot in their homes by the UVF: two (brothers) from the Reavey family, and three members of the O'Dowd family.⁴³⁴ The following day a mini-bus van of men on their way home from work in a textile factory near the village of Kingsmill in South Armagh was pulled over by a group of armed men. The workmen were ordered out of their van, lined up, and asked to confirm their religious denomination. The only Catholic, driver Richard Hughes, was told to make himself scarce before the remaining 11 Protestant-identifying men were gunned down. Alan Black survived despite having been shot 18 times, but the ten other Protestant men died at the scene.⁴³⁵ This event has become known as the Kingsmill Massacre.

The PIRA claimed responsibility for the attack under the nom de guerre, 'South Armagh Republican Action Force' (SARAF).⁴³⁶ Following the attack, the *Irish News* recorded that the SARAF stated that they "would not stand idly by while loyalist murder gangs continue their campaign in Portadown, Lurgan and the surrounding areas".⁴³⁷ SARAF is widely held by

⁴³³ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 1265-1267.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*, references: 1560-1564.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, references: 1566, 1567, 1568, 1569, 1570, 1571, 1572, 1573, 1574, 1575.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.611-612.

⁴³⁷ *Irish News*, 2 January 1976, p.1.

historians, contemporaries, and journalists alike, to be simply a cover name for the PIRA.⁴³⁸

In June 2011 the Historical Enquiries Team (HET) investigation concluded that the PIRA had been responsible for the attack.⁴³⁹ And contemporary ballistics evidence appears to support this also. The *RUC-Garda Co-coordinating Committee Report on South Armagh* (February 1976) includes a map which indicates that the same weapon used at Kingsmill can be linked to three other attacks in the region; two of which were claimed by the PIRA and the other, alleged to have been perpetrated by them also.⁴⁴⁰

SARAF does not appear to have claimed other attacks, and the practice of adopting a nom de guerre was highly unusual for the PIRA campaign in general. There were only a handful of occasions when alternative cover names were used by the organisation: ‘Republican Action Force’ (ReAF) claimed four further attacks, all of which were sectarian and retaliatory by nature; and the Direct Action Against Drugs (DAAD) claimed attacks on thirteen individuals for alleged involvement in drug dealing after the 1994.⁴⁴¹ The decision to use the cover name highlights the sensitive and exceptional nature of the attack.

Sean O’Callaghan, former southern commander of the PIRA, and eventually informer against the organisation, stated that the attack represented a bid to put a stop to loyalist sectarian

⁴³⁸ R., English, *Armed Struggle* (Oxford, 2004), p.171.

⁴³⁹ The HET is a specialist police team set up to re-examine 3,260 killings during the Troubles in Northern Ireland ‘New inquest into Kingsmill murders’, *BBC*, 7 August 2013, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-23609459>, (05/04/2020).

⁴⁴⁰ ‘RUC-Garda Co-coordinating Committee Report on South Armagh’, February 1976, TNA, CJ4/2853.

⁴⁴¹ For ‘ReAF’ see McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 1733-1735, 1676, 1768-1769, 1774, 1908, 1920; and for ‘DAAD’ references: 3470, 3523-3524, 3527-3531, 3546, 3581, 3642, 3661-3662.

attacks in the region – an attack to end all attacks, as it were.⁴⁴² The attack at Kingsmill appears to have been too well orchestrated and planned to have been a knee-jerk response to the murders the night before. The minibus of workmen must have been under observation for some time as it was specifically targeted. The Catholic driver was known by name, and the shooters' escape from the scene was executed seamlessly. According to Toby Harnden's account of the attack in his book, *Bandit Country*, twelve armed men flagged down the van by waving and using a red torch to mislead the driver into believing they were being stopped at an army check point. He records that 'It was only when the name of Richard Hughes, the only Catholic, was called out and he was ordered to step forward that they began to realise that something was wrong.'⁴⁴³ Such planning and orchestration do not indicate that the attack that was designed in the few hours after the Catholic civilians were killed the previous night. Rather, the attack appears to have been planned for some time, and perhaps held in reserve, to be triggered by a particularly egregious loyalist attack.

Reflecting on the incident many years after the fact O'Callaghan asserted that, since the assassination of Catholic civilians in the area ceased afterwards that 'it worked'.⁴⁴⁴ Whether or not we take O'Callaghan's explanation and assessment seriously, it is true that sectarian reprisals in the region ceased in the aftermath. Indeed, there were only four subsequent attacks of such nature, all of which occurred at least six months later and were not confined to the Armagh region. However, this is not to say that the tactic was effective or without repercussions. To the contrary, Richard English has highlighted that the event has been

⁴⁴² Sean O'Callaghan, personal communication, February 27, 2015.

⁴⁴³ Harnden, *Bandit Country*, p.185.

⁴⁴⁴ Sean O'Callaghan, personal communication, February 27, 2015.

noted by some leading loyalist paramilitaries to have been instrumental to their decision to engage in loyalist violence themselves.⁴⁴⁵ In any case, the case study provides further evidence of the connection between loyalist and republican paramilitary violence in the period.

Some have argued that the term sectarianism should have a broader application.⁴⁴⁶ James Dingley and Steve Bruce, for example, reject the notion that the PIRA could or did target members of the police and military – in or out of uniform – in a manner that could be described as non-sectarian for, not only was the personnel employed in these forces almost exclusively recruited from the Protestant population of Northern Ireland, but the very professions were symbols of the union with Britain.⁴⁴⁷ This debate remains unresolved in the literature and is perhaps unresolvable. However, as the evidence presented in this part of the thesis makes clear, this contest has not always been academic – it could and did have real world consequences. The PIRA's decision to target off-duty security-force personnel inspired reciprocal assassination attacks by loyalist paramilitaries, and the PIRA felt compelled to respond with further violence. In this sense, the fact that the definition of a sectarian assassination has and continues to be understood by some as having a broader application matters, in and of itself.

⁴⁴⁵ Including, for instance, loyalist leader Billy Wright. English, *Armed Struggle*, p.172.

⁴⁴⁶ James Dingley, 'A Reply', pp.106–17.

⁴⁴⁷ Dingley, 'A Reply', p.108; Steve Bruce 'Victim selection in ethnic conflict: Motives and attitudes in Irish republicanism', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 9/1, (1997), pp.64-65.

Conclusion

The PIRA's decisions regarding the targets and tactics they used and statements they issued were acutely affected by the political conditions. The intense connections between public opinion and the actions of the PIRA's political rivals and opponents have been revealed to play an important role in shaping the PIRA's contest with loyalist paramilitaries and rival republican paramilitaries, as well as their campaigns against (alleged) 'collaborators', traitors, and anti-social behaviour. These were critical, but smaller elements of their wider programme of activity than the PIRA's war on commercial and security-force targets. In this sense, the relationship between public opinion and the PIRA's campaign against the security forces and commercial targets was more noticeable more often. For the same reason, these elements of the armed struggle will feature more heavily throughout the remainder of this thesis.

It has been argued that collateral damage was an undesired outcome of any given PIRA operation. The fact that collateral damage was also a potential (or likely) consequence of PIRA's actions during most of their attacks, is the reason why this is a central theme of part II and part III of the thesis. Material factors also play an important role in shaping the way that the PIRA decided to apply violence. The various reasons why this was the case will be considered next and are the principal concern of part II.

Part II

The Armed Struggle and the Material Conditions

Part II of the thesis examines the relationship between material factors and the character of the violence that was perpetrated by the PIRA. The research findings reveal that PIRA violence was very much subject to material constraints: the number of members they had recruited and trained, and the volume and quality of weapons, ammunition, and explosives they had acquired or manufactured. Moreover, PIRA resources are found to play an important role in explaining the macro-dynamics of the armed struggle including the annual volume of shooting and bombing attacks they perpetrated, or the number of fatalities they caused. The specific characteristics of PIRA weapons, targets, and the environments in which they operated, are also shown to be an essential part of explaining the micro-dynamics of PIRA violence. That is, the weapons and tactics the PIRA decided to combine to attack different targets in different spaces. However, it is also clear that PIRA assaults were only ever effective to the extent to which they matched the counterinsurgency (COIN) measures that were put in place to counter them. For this reason, it is argued that the reciprocal sequence of moves and countermoves that were made by the PIRA and the security forces, as each side battled to gain military advantage over the other, must also factor into any explanation of the changing dynamics of the armed struggle over time.

PIRA Resources and the Macro-Dynamics of the Armed Struggle

The PIRA dedicated a significant proportion of time to the task of acquiring the manpower and material resources necessary to wage armed struggle on the scale that they believed

would yield results. They recruited and trained volunteers to fight and armed them by raising funds to purchase arms and establishing a network of underground contacts to smuggle them from their (sometimes international) sources into PIRA hands. To some extent, the scale and scope of the PIRA campaign depended on how successful the organisation had been in these endeavours.

The number of individuals actively participating in PIRA activities varied over time. Precise data on this subject is not available. However, credible sources have estimated that before the split the IRA had approximately 120 active members,⁴⁴⁸ twenty of whom broke away from the movement to form the PIRA in December 1969.⁴⁴⁹ There is thought to have been a steep upward trajectory in recruitment into the PIRA in the early 1970s, including as many as 1000 members in Belfast alone at this time.⁴⁵⁰ PIRA membership is thought to have reached its peak in the mid-1970s at a high point of around 1,500 members and decreased incrementally after this.⁴⁵¹ By 1994, PIRA numbers were believed to have dropped to around 500 members.⁴⁵² Part-time auxiliaries or civilians sympathetic to the PIRA cause would sometimes aid the organization locally, in support roles. For example, some acted as look-out to warn the PIRA when to open or hold their fire.⁴⁵³

⁴⁴⁸ Alonso, *The IRA*, p.42.

⁴⁴⁹ Bishop and Mallie, *Provisional IRA*, p.137.

⁴⁵⁰ Toolis, *Rebel Hearts*, p.102; Molony, *Secret History*, p.80.

⁴⁵¹ Martin Melaugh, 'Estimates of the Strength of Paramilitary Groups', CAIN, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/violence/paramilitary2.htm>, (19/03/2022).

⁴⁵² Ibid.

⁴⁵³ Mark Urban, *Big Boys' Rules: The SAS and the Secret Struggle against the IRA* (London, 1992), p.30; Molony, *Secret History*, p.87; Bradley, *Insider*, p.497; Mac Stiofáin, *Memoirs*, p.219.

The PIRA was not represented evenly across the Northern Ireland. Initially, the PIRA was mostly contained to Derry and Belfast. Outside these two hubs there was a stronger commitment to the OIRA.⁴⁵⁴ However, the PIRA grew in popularity in these regions over time and gained members who had defected from the OIRA in 1972 when the group declared a ceasefire. Still, Belfast was where the PIRA had its largest representation throughout the period under study. Out of the 1500 members the PIRA is believed to have had in the mid-1970s, 800 were thought to have been based in Northern Ireland: 600 in Belfast, 100 in Derry and 100 in other areas.⁴⁵⁵

To wage armed struggle the PIRA needed to amass funds, weapons, ammunition, or explosives. Research on the subject, by co-authors John Horgan and Max Taylor, and M.L.R Smith and Isabel Woodford suggest that the PIRA raised funds from a variety of sources via legal and illegal means including honest and dishonest petitions to the public in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and the U.S.A; extortion and racketeering and armed robberies.⁴⁵⁶ The funds raised by and for the PIRA were used to support the campaign in various ways.

A portion of the PIRA's funds was used for publicity and propaganda purposes. The PIRA produced pamphlets, periodicals and purchased advertising space in other newspapers.

⁴⁵⁴ Via either membership of OIRA, or membership of Republican Clubs that were loyal to OIRA over PIRA. Bishop and Mallie, *Provisional IRA*, p.144.

⁴⁵⁵ William D. Flackes and Sydney Elliott, *Northern Ireland: A Political Directory, 1968-1999*, 5th edn. (Belfast, 1999), p.401.

⁴⁵⁶ Horgan and Taylor, *Financing the Provisional IRA: Part 1*, pp.1-38; Horgan and Taylor, *Financing the Provisional IRA: Part 2*, pp.1-60; Smith and Woodford, 'The Political Economy', pp.213-240.

They produced, for example, a 40-page booklet called *Torture – the record of British brutality in Northern Ireland* to protest the maltreatment of internees in December 1971.⁴⁵⁷ And, in 1973 the PIRA produced a history-come-manifesto entitled *Freedom Struggle*.⁴⁵⁸ This 100-page paper-back booklet may have been used for training or recruitment purposes; it certainly caused some concern in the Northern Ireland Office. The NIO summary of events for the week commencing 14 July 1973 noted the publication of this book and subsequent efforts to capture and destroy copies of it in the Republic of Ireland:

At a press conference called on Friday 13 July in the Killiney Heights Hotel near Dublin, several leaders of the Provisional IRA (including Seamus Twomey and David O’Connell) publicised a propaganda paperback entitled “The Freedom Struggle”. (10,000 copies of the book were later seized by the Irish Republic police at a printing works in Drogheda.)In Dublin on Monday 16 July, Mr Patrick Cooney, Republic Minister of Justice, stated that the Government was determined to apprehend all known Provisional IRA supporters breaking the law and to seize and subsequently ban all published documents purporting to raise money or encourage recruits for the Provisional IRA.⁴⁵⁹

The PIRA took out death notices for fallen members in newspapers and also placed adverts that protested prison conditions, the maltreatment of prisoners, or claimed solidarity with hunger strikers. They did so at cost, on a regular basis, and in volume. In the month of November 1974, for example, there were 139 republican notices in the *Irish News* alone. These included notices in support of PIRA hunger striker Frank Stagg, and notices to fallen PIRA members James McDade, Michael McVerry and Hugh Cooney.⁴⁶⁰ The fact that PIRA death notices formed part of the discussions regarding the prospective introduction of legislation to ‘deal with terrorist propaganda’ in 1976, demonstrates that figures in

⁴⁵⁷ McGuire, *To Take to Arms*, p.74.

⁴⁵⁸ PIRA, *Freedom Struggle*.

⁴⁵⁹ 14 – 20 July 1973 in ‘NIO Summary 1973’, TNA, CJ 4/1024.

⁴⁶⁰ *Irish News*, 1-30 November 1974 (30 issues).

government considered the practice to have some degree of impact.⁴⁶¹ Maria Maguire's account of her (ultimately unsuccessful) attempt to arrange for two newspaper advertisements to be placed to protest against the continued imprisonment of Joe Cahill and Ruairí Ó Brádaigh (former PIRA chief of staff and Sinn Féin president, respectively) at an estimated cost of between £2000 to £3000 in September 1971, indicates that the enterprise could be expensive.⁴⁶²

When it was necessary (or possible) PIRA funds were also used to make contributions towards the travel and living expenses of PIRA volunteers, or to the families who became financially burdened when their relatives inside the movement were killed or incarcerated. Seán Mac Stiofáin gives an account of the 'wages' he believed were paid to certain PIRA volunteers in the early part of the 1970s:

A single man who was a full-time [P]IRA volunteer got his food and a few shillings pocket money. Married men received up to fifteen pounds a week, which was the highest rate paid to anybody in the movement, including myself. Even then I drew it only when I needed it after I gave up my regular job.⁴⁶³

John Crawley (an active PIRA volunteer between May 1980 September 1984) offers a similar account of the wages prospectively available to PIRA volunteers:

I never had money. An IRA volunteer on full-time active service was supposed to be given ten pounds a week by the organisation to buy cigarettes or toiletries. I rarely saw that tenner. I felt guilty asking for it, especially after so many men died on hunger strike. Like most volunteers, I neither experienced nor expected the incentive of salary.⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁶¹ 'Legislation to deal with Terrorist Propaganda', S.S. Bampton to Mr R.J. Seaman 22 March 1976, TNA: CJ 4 4/4353, p.2.

⁴⁶² McGuire claimed to have secured verbal agreement for these advertisements but that the newspapers ultimately decided that they were unwilling to proceed to print. McGuire, *To Take to Arms*, pp.120-121.

⁴⁶³ Mac Stiofáin, *Memoirs*, p.303.

⁴⁶⁴ Crawley, *The Yank*, pp. 79-80.

The PIRA redirected most of the funds that were raised towards securing weapons, ammunition, and explosives from local and international sources. The organization developed and manufactured a wide variety of weapons, in addition to acquiring them from external sources. In total, the PIRA amassed an arsenal that included a range of guns, incendiaries and improvised explosive devices (IEDs), grenades, and mortars – and did so at an early stage.

The IRA (pre-split) was said to have been in the possession of a very small number of old firearms, some dating back to the Second World War. These included a .303 Lee Enfield rifle, a couple of Thompson sub-machine guns, and half a dozen pistols.⁴⁶⁵ Some of these weapons would have come into PIRA hands after the split, but most weapons were acquired or manufactured after 1969.

The PIRA are known to have manufactured some home-made firearms, but most were purchased from or donated by external sources. An estimate of the PIRA's inventory in 19996 included: around 700 assault rifles (650 AK-47's and a few dozen ArmaLite AR-15's); 12 medium machine guns (7.62mm FN MAG); 20 heavy machine guns (12.7mmx107mm DShK); an anti-air-craft missiles (the SAM-7) which is not thought to have been used; 40 Rocket Launchers (RPG-7); 60 revolvers (Webley .455 revolvers); 6 flame throwers (LPO-50 flame throwers); 600 assorted detonators; 3 tonnes of Semtex (commercial high

⁴⁶⁵ James Adams, Robin Morgan and Anthony Bambridge, *Ambush: The War Between the SAS and the IRA* (London, 1988), p.23.

explosive).⁴⁶⁶ These weapons were acquired by the PIRA from a variety of different international sources.

Several weapons consignments are believed to have been successfully smuggled to the PIRA during the 1970s. For example, in 1970 it is thought that 50 revolvers were supplied by the Basque paramilitary group known as ETA, and a cargo of ArmaLite AR-15 rifles were sent from sympathisers in Philadelphia (USA). In 1972 the PIRA acquired RPG-7 rocket launchers from Europe and may also have received two consignments of small arms from sources in Libya. Between 1973 and 1978 it is thought that the IRA acquired an estimated 500,000 rounds of ammunition (5.56 x 45 mm cartridges) that were stolen from a US Marine base camp in North Carolina. And a network set up by a supporter named George Harrison is thought to have smuggled rifles from the USA in the early 1970s and a weapons consignment that included six M60 Machine guns and 100 M-16 rifles in 1977.

Data regarding the weapons that were found by the security forces in Northern Ireland throughout the 1970s (which also includes those confiscated from other groups) broadly corroborates these reports. The quantity and type of weapons confiscated annually is by extension an indication of what was being acquired and used by the paramilitaries over time. Figure 3.1 indicates that pistols and rifles were the types of firearms most prevalent in the 1970s, and that machine guns were acquired and used in much smaller numbers.

⁴⁶⁶ Sean Boyle, 'Uncovering the Irish Republican Army', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, (PBS Front Line, 01 August 1996; repr), <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/ira/inside/weapons.html>, (15/03/2022); Martin Melaugh, 'Estimates of the Strength of Paramilitary Groups', CAIN: <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/violence/paramilitary2.htm>, (19/03/2022).

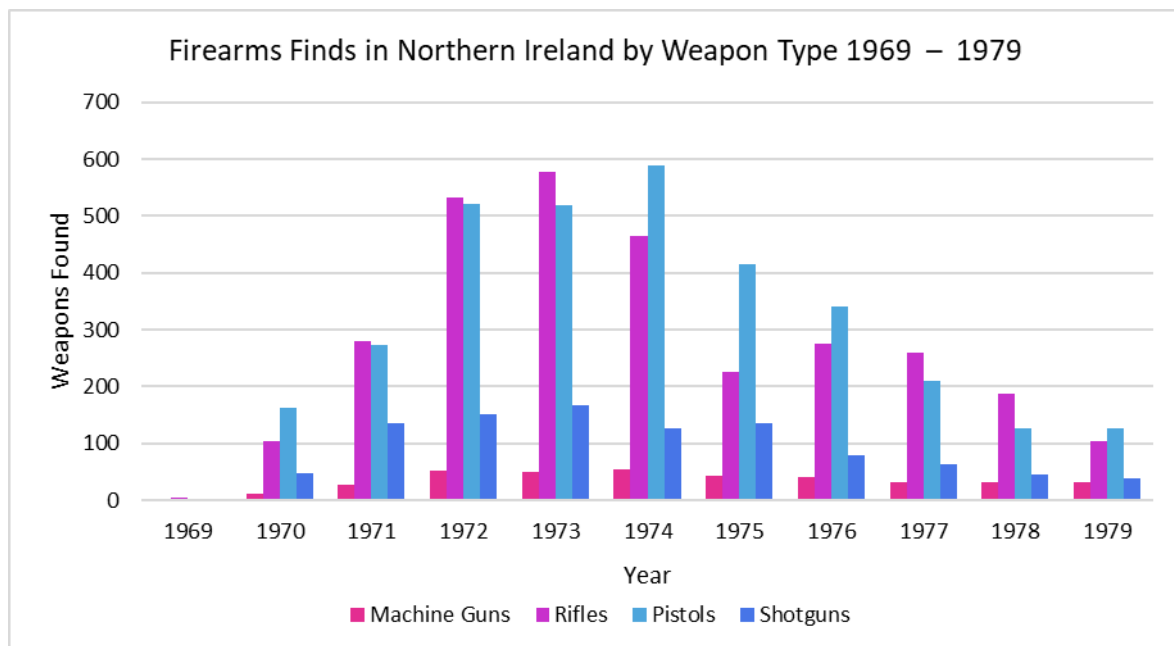


Figure 3.1 Firearms Finds by Type 1969 – 1979.

Sources: Table NI-SEC-07: Firearms, and explosive finds in Northern Ireland (only), 1969-2003', CAIN, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ni/security/security.htm>, (21/03/2022); 'Stats: Up to 26 March, 1980', The British Army in Ulster, Volume 4, (Belfast, 1981), p.232.

The PIRA developed an extensive range of IEDs. The PIRA sourced the components to make these devices from both willing and unwilling sources. Military grade explosives were supplied to the PIRA from international sources (including Libya) in the 1980s. Commercial explosives and detonators, or the ingredients that can be used to manufacture homemade explosives – including agricultural fertilisers – were donated by or stolen from those who had access to them legally, including farmers or quarry employees.⁴⁶⁷

The number of individual shooting and bombing attacks the PIRA could launch was subject to the number of individuals they inducted into the movement, and the weapons they had

⁴⁶⁷ P.G. Macdonald, *Stopping the Clock* (London, 1977), pp.133-134.

available. It took a significant number of man-hours to prepare an execute PIRA operations. The evidence suggests that many of the PIRA operations had been preceded by an extensive amount of reconnaissance work to identify their prospective target and determine the best time, place, location, weapon, and tactics to combine to launch an assault against them.⁴⁶⁸ Further volunteers or auxiliary members could be involved in support roles during the execution stage of the attack. It was common for operations to involve a driver and a look-out.⁴⁶⁹ For instance, a 20-year-old male was sentenced to 20-years for manslaughter after admitting he acted as a lookout during a fatal sniper attack on a soldier in West Belfast 10 December 1973; the appellant had been a member of the junior wing of the PIRA at the time of the attack.⁴⁷⁰

A lot of time was dedicated to transporting PIRA weapons and ammunition to and from each operation and arranging for them to be hidden in between times. Female PIRA members or civilians (willingly or coerced) were often used to transport weapons to and from PIRA operations on their person or in handbags or prams. Men found alternative ways to disguise weapons. A man described as a well-known member of the PIRA was reported to have been caught at around 9 p.m. on 13 September 1977 carrying a soft guitar case down Kashmir Street in Belfast containing two ArmaLite (AR-15) rifles, a .30-06 Garand rifle, a .38 Magnum pistol, ammunition, and several pairs of gloves.⁴⁷¹

⁴⁶⁸ See, for example, Collins, *Killing Rage*, pp.100, 105; Crawley, *The Yank*, pp.226, 231-233; O'Callaghan, *The Informer*, pp.103-107.

⁴⁶⁹ Crawley, *The Yank*, p.226.

⁴⁷⁰ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 976; 3 – 9 November 1973 in 'NIO Summary 1973', TNA, CJ 4/1024.

⁴⁷¹ 'Guitar Case Find', 13 September 1973, (Photograph), Barzilay, *Volume 3*, pp.158-159.

For all these reasons, it is no great surprise that there is a general correlation between the annual number of volunteers thought to have been active in the PIRA, the weapons they accrued, and the total volume of conflict-related violent assaults occurring in Northern Ireland during the 1970s. Figures 3.2 and 3.3 demonstrate that the total volume of incidents rose sharply from the end of 1969 until it eventually reached a peak in 1972. Afterward, the annual volume of violent episodes began to decrease over time and had reduced by the end of the decade to approximately one third of the level that had been reached in 1972. There was a slight uplift in the volume of incidents of violence occurring in 1976 because the PIRA resumed the armed struggle on 23 January 1976 after a suspended period of ceasefire that commenced on 9 February 1975.

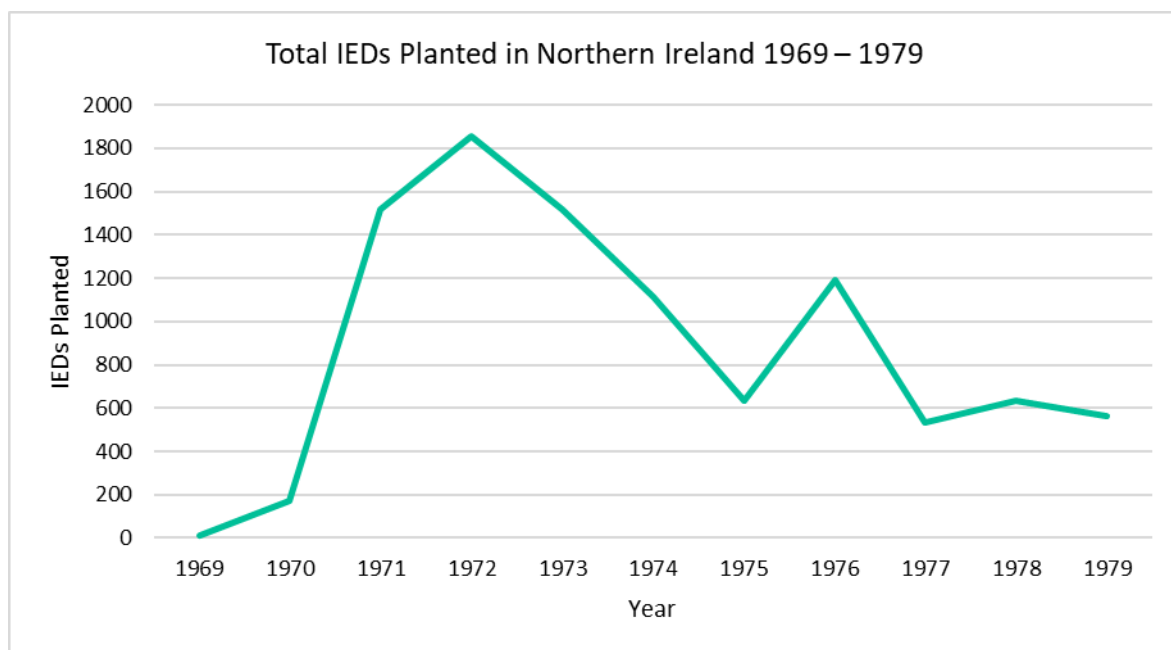


Figure 3.2 Total IEDs Planted in Northern Ireland 1969 – 1979

Source: Table NI-SEC-06: Security related incidents (number) in Northern Ireland (only), shootings, bombings, and incendiaries, 1969 to 2003', <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ni/security/security.htm>, (21/03/2022).

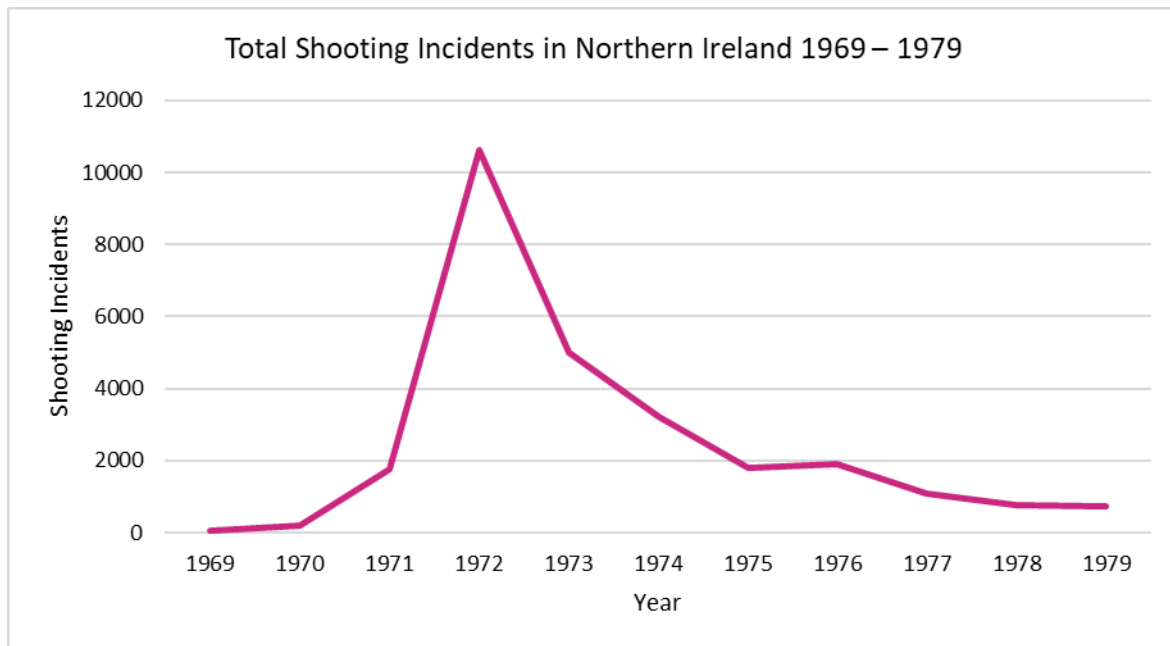


Figure 3.3 Total Shooting Incidents in Northern Ireland 1969 – 1979.

Source: Table NI-SEC-06: Security related incidents (number) in Northern Ireland (only), shootings, bombings, and incendiaries, 1969 to 2003', CAIN, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ni/security/security.htm>, (21/03/2022).

PIRA resources also affected the scale and scope of their operations, individually. When the PIRA had a greater strength in numbers and both weapons and ammunition available in large supply they could mount larger or more complex operations. PIRA operations conducted in the mid-1970s could sometimes involve a higher number of volunteers in a single attack than the total number who had active the movement when it formed in December 1969. For example, it is thought that around 40 PIRA members were involved in the gun, mortar, and rocket attack that was launched against the Clogher UDR base (Co. Tyrone) on the evening of 2 May 1974, and that the PIRA sustained fire against the base for around 20 minutes.⁴⁷²

⁴⁷² 25 April – 8 May 1974 in 'NIO Summary 1974-1975', TNA, CJ 4/1787; McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 1083; O'Callaghan, *The Informer*, p.95.

The total volume of fatalities attributed to the PIRA (see figure 3.4) fluctuated in accordance with the volume and type of resources they had available over time. The annual volume of security force personnel killed by the PIRA can partially explained by the fact that the PIRA was continually acquiring or developing bigger and more powerful weapons. The PIRA did not have the material resources to begin targeting security force personnel proactively on a significant scale until 1971.

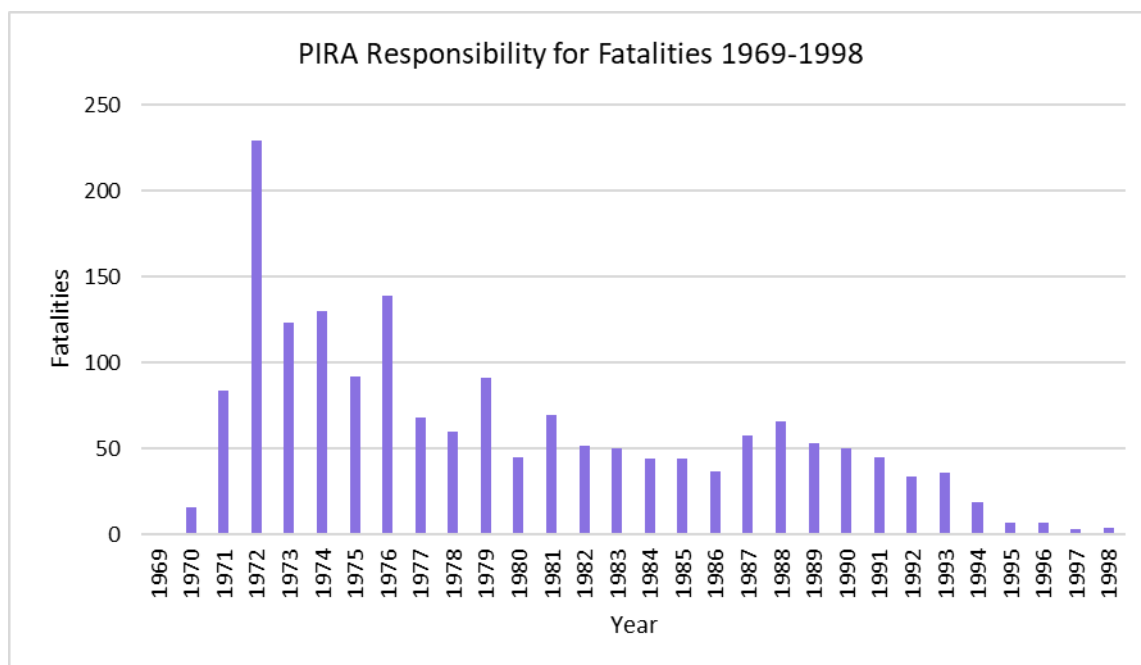


Figure 3.4 PIRA Responsibility for Fatalities 1969 – 1998.

Sources: Adapted from: 'Table 2 - Responsibility for Deaths' in McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, p.1553.

The annual total of security force fatalities attributed to the PIRA (see figure 2.2 in part I) can be explained in part, by the timing of key weapons acquisitions or developments. M1 carbines and ArmaLite assault rifles from the U.S. were instrumental to the single-shot sniper campaign taking off from August 1971 onwards;⁴⁷³ earlier shooting attacks had

⁴⁷³ See for instance, McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 78, 78, 82.

tended to involve handguns or a Thompson submachine gun which would not have been as suitable for this tactic.⁴⁷⁴ Victim-operated car bombs were part of the PIRA arsenal from August 1970 onwards (more on this below) and went on to claim the lives of 17 members of the security forces in this decade.⁴⁷⁵ Victim-operated devices that were fitted with an anti-handling device killed soldiers and ATO's who were caught unaware from 9 September 1971 onwards.⁴⁷⁶ The PIRA is thought to have acquired the M60 general purpose machine gun in 1977 and proceeded to put the weapon to use with deadly effect the following spring: two soldiers were killed with an M60 in 1978.⁴⁷⁷

Finally, PIRA resources also affected the geographical distribution of violence. PIRA operations were initially confined to the urban areas where they had established a presence but moved into the rural and border regions over time.⁴⁷⁸ The gradual development of the PIRA's rural campaign is evidence in intelligence reports of their activities over time. An intelligence report on the PIRA's rural activity composed and circulated in January 1973 concluded that at that stage the rural campaign was believed to be 'very much subsidiary to the Belfast and Londonderry campaign'.⁴⁷⁹ By contrast the RUC-Garda Co-coordinating Committee Report on South Armagh from February 1976 reported that 'A small active, well-trained, well-equipped Provisional IRA force operates in this area'.⁴⁸⁰ It is also apparent in

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., references: 53, 60, 61, 62.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., references: 40, 41, 733, 734, 848, 849, 850, 851, 865, 977, 1038, 1203, 1449, 1864, 1871, 1975, 1987.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., references: 122, 474, 524, 946, 1297, 1407, 1869.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., references: 2006, 2036.

⁴⁷⁸ 'IRA in Rural Area', 18 January 1973, p.2, TNA, WO 305/4210.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁰ 'RUC-Garda Co-coordinating Committee Report on South Armagh', (February 1976), p.10, TNA, CJ4/2853.

the geographical distribution of the fatalities the organisation is attributed responsibility for causing in this period.

Figure 3.5 demonstrates that in sum, there were very few fatalities that resulted from PIRA violence outside Belfast and Derry in 1970, but fatalities did result increasing volume elsewhere over time. The armed struggle first claimed lives outside Belfast and Derry on 12 August 1970 when a PIRA car bomb killed two RUC constables on the Lissaraw Road, close to Crossmaglen (Co. Armagh).⁴⁸¹ The next examples were not until 1971: a tripwire bomb planted by the PIRA killed five BBC engineers that were tasked with repairing the BBC Transmitter by Brougher Mountain (West Tyrone) on 9 February 1971;⁴⁸² and the PIRA shot part-time UDR Private Francis Veitch at the Kinawley RUC station sentry outpost (Co. Fermanagh) on the morning of 3 September 1971.⁴⁸³

⁴⁸¹ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 40-41.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*, references: 55-59.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, reference: 118.

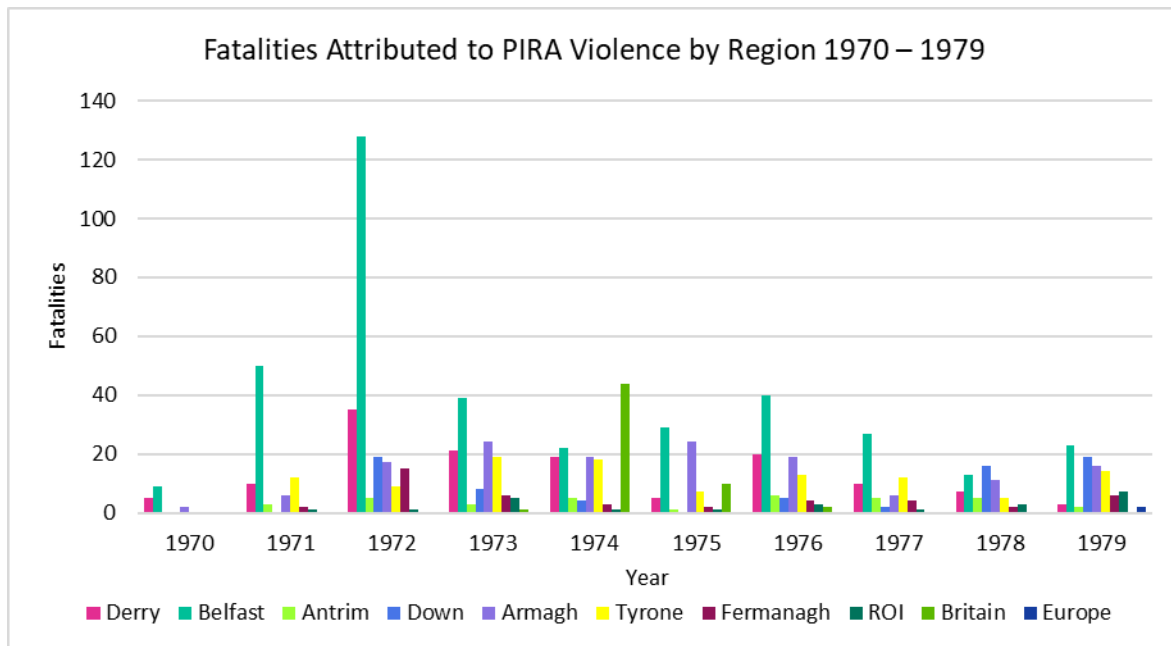


Figure 3.5 Fatalities Attributed to PIRA Violence by Region 1970 – 1979.

Sources: Adapted from: "Organisation" by "Year" and "Location", in Malcom Sutton, *An Index of Deaths from the Conflict in Ireland*, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/cgi-bin/tab2.pl>, (30-07-2022).

PIRA skills and innovation are also important elements of the story of the relationship between material factors and the macro-dynamics of the armed struggle. Some of the early members of the PIRA had prior paramilitary or military experience: most of the initial PIRA leadership were veterans of the earlier IRA campaigns, and one of the early members of the Derry Brigade, Phil O'Donnell, was a former British military paratrooper.⁴⁸⁴ But most other people that were recruited had no previous experience and needed to be trained.

Across the decades the PIRA are reported to have organised internal training programmes for new recruits and existing members, of varying quality and depth, on aspects of military theory, military practice, and Irish history. The PIRA are thought to have conducted most of

⁴⁸⁴ English, *Armed Struggle*, p.109; Bishop and Mallie, *Provisional IRA*, p.156.

their weapons training in the Republic of Ireland.⁴⁸⁵ New recruits were sent in small groups to ‘training camps’ to learn weapons handling, firing, and a little fieldcraft.⁴⁸⁶ The PIRA are also believed to have offered specialist courses to develop skills in sniping or bomb making. Seán Mac Stiofáin noted that special sniper training courses were run for those who showed promise from the summer of 1971 onwards.⁴⁸⁷ An intelligence report on the PIRA’s rural activity by 1973 (composed and circulated two years prior to the publication of Mac Stiofáin’s memoir) corroborates this claim:

In recent months [PIRA training] courses have become more sophisticated covering sniping and setting up a claymore under scout cover.⁴⁸⁸

The PIRA developed written materials to supplement training or enforce control within the ranks. The leadership are known to have studied literature on guerrilla warfare and anti-colonial warfare.⁴⁸⁹ They also had access to a variety of writings on this subject by Irish republican authors, including those associated with earlier iterations of the IRA. *Notes on Guerrilla Warfare* (1956), a series of twelve battle lectures written in the 1950s by Seán Cronin – then IRA strategist and training officer – were still thought to be in use in the early 1970s.⁴⁹⁰ The PIRA also adopted the long-standing *General Army Orders* – which was a list of 13 regulations pertaining to membership, organisation, and the scope of the armed struggle.⁴⁹¹

⁴⁸⁵ Barzilay, *Volume 1*, p.127.

⁴⁸⁶ ‘IRA in Rural Area’, 18 January 1973, p.10, TNA, WO 305/4210.

⁴⁸⁷ Mac Stiofáin, *Memoirs*, pp.301-302.

⁴⁸⁸ ‘IRA in Rural Area’, 18 January 1973, p.10, TNA, WO 305/4210.

⁴⁸⁹ McGuire, *To Take to Arms*, p.69.

⁴⁹⁰ According to J. Bowyer Bell, *Targets and Tactics*, p.339 – Seán Cronin is believed to be the author of: *Notes on Guerrilla Warfare: Handbook for Volunteers of The Irish Republican Army* (1956), IWMA, LBY K. 81 / 3476.

⁴⁹¹ ‘Appendix 2: IRA General Army Orders (As amended by the Army Council) October 1973’, in O’Brien, *The Long War*, pp.406-408.

By the late 1970s the PIRA had produced a more extensive training manual, called the Green Book.⁴⁹² This document certainly echoes prior republican publications. However, it also includes a great deal of original material that it would seem fair to suggest was born out of the PIRA's specific experiences during the 1970s. The Green Book's focus on strategies to resist in-depth interrogation tactics, for example, must have been developed after it became apparent that PIRA prisoners were being subject to such tactics while they were in police custody. The memoirs of PIRA volunteers that were recruited and trained from the late 1970s onwards are clear that a non-negotiable part of their induction was being 'Green Booked' – which meant to receive lessons on Irish history and the content of the Green Book. John Crawley's memoir claims that his induction into the PIRA in May 1980 involved being Green Booked and swearing an oath:

I was sitting in a small room between the pub and the kitchen when John Joe walked in smoking a pipe. He threw a book on my lap. "Read that," he said. It was the "Green Book," the IRA's manual of rules and procedures. It had to be studied before you could be sworn in as a volunteer. One passage read: "The Army as an organisation claims and expects your total allegiance without reservation. All potential volunteers must realise that the threat of capture and of long jail sentences are a very real danger and a shadow which hangs over every volunteer. Shortly after that, I met the Tyrone man again. He swore me into the IRA with the following oath: "I, John Crawley, promise that I will promote the objects of Óglaigh na hÉireann to the best of my knowledge and ability and that I will obey all orders and regulations issued to me by the Army Authority and by my superior officer."⁴⁹³

Former volunteers (and informers) Eamon Collins and Kevin Fulton (who were informers) described being 'Green Booked' in 1979 and 1987, respectively.⁴⁹⁴ Fulton, who was an

⁴⁹² Text of Irish Republican Army (IRA) 'Green Book' (Book I and II), http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/organ/ira/ira_green_book.htm, (01/02/2021).

⁴⁹³ Crawley, *The Yank*, p.40.

⁴⁹⁴ Collins also refers to his cousin, Micky, having completed their 'Green Book lectures' soon before they assassinated former UDR officer Norman Hanna in March 1983. Collins, *Killing Rage*, pp.66, 106; Fulton, *Double Agent*, pp.79-81.

undercover security force agent from the outset, explained that in his case this involved one-to-one tutorials on a weekly basis for a period of six weeks.

Experience gained over time bolstered skills acquired in initial training. Those who survived long enough to gain significant battle experience or showed a natural aptitude for designing the weapons and tactics of guerrilla warfare could, individually, play a significant role in determining the changing character of the armed struggle over time. A skilled marksman could single-handedly expedite the PIRA's sniping campaign. British Army officer and a bomb disposal expert, Lieutenant Colonel Stephen George noted that the skilled marksmanship of a PIRA sniper was pertinent to the killing of soldiers in Belfast in August 1971, including Private George Crozier at 3 p.m. on 23 August 1971:

A few weeks after the incendiaries appeared, the media began putting pressure on us about the possibility of the IRA using foreign mercenaries in Northern Ireland. Certainly, there had been one or two shooting incidents that showed the terrorists were using one particularly good marksman. There was an Army post on top an old mill in Flax Street, Belfast. A soldier was going off duty and had taken off his flak jacket as he began to leave his perch high above the street. Four shots rang out. The first hit the brick work four feet low, the second and third fatally wounded the soldier, and the fourth shot missed. From the brickwork we discovered a bullet fragment, and I guessed it was from a .233 mm. ArmaLite bullet. The gunman had hit his target from more than 250 yards range. The IRA had got hold of a good guy with a rifle. Newspapers began talking about a mercenary from behind the Iron Curtain and we couldn't disprove it.⁴⁹⁵

Likewise, a single innovation in weapons production or tactical planning could take the armed struggle in a new direction. Innovations in weapons technology could dramatically reduce the likelihood that the PIRA would fall victim to their own devices or cause

⁴⁹⁵ Lieutenant-Colonel George Styles, G.C., *Bombs Have No Pity: My War Against Terrorism* (London, 1975), p.110.

unintended casualties. For instance, the inclusion of an arming switch in PIRA IEDs made the PIRA IED campaign safer for the PIRA bomber than it had previously been (it was never 'safe'). This is because the arming switch adds another break in the circuit that, if completed, would fire the device meaning that it is much less possible to fire the device prematurely when assembling, transporting or planting it. The first known example of a PIRA IED with an arming switch was found on 29 November 1970, and their inclusion is said to have become standard practice during 1971.⁴⁹⁶ Other innovations allowed the PIRA to circumnavigate the challenge of acquiring illegal materials or weapons. For example, the PIRA developed mixes of homemade explosive using substances which were easier to obtain and continued to update the recipe as and when the ingredients they were using became illegal over time.

The notion that the PIRA inflicted more fatalities on security-force personnel over time because they were better trained or more experienced is, however, complicated by evidence that suggests that the training offered by the PIRA did not always improve in quality or translate into effective results. Former chief of staff Seán Mac Stiofáin makes clear in his memoir that training was both important and time consuming:

No army, whether guerrilla or conventional, can hope for good results without trained troops. Time was needed to complete the training of the new volunteers who had been streaming into the IRA in the later part of 1970.⁴⁹⁷

Several accounts suggest that there were times when the volume of people expressing an interest in joining the movement outweighed the PIRA's capacity to offer training. This

⁴⁹⁶ Cochrane, 'The development', pp.68-69.

⁴⁹⁷ Mac Stiofáin, *Memoirs*, p.164.

created a conflict of interest whereby the PIRA was concerned that they were unable to train new recruits in a short enough space of time to capitalise fully on the wave of enthusiasm. Contemporaries to the conflict give different accounts of how the PIRA handled this conundrum. At one extreme, Mac Stiofáin does not give any indication that the PIRA cut corners when it came to training new recruits. Instead, he suggests that for example in Derry a waiting list was opened.⁴⁹⁸ Mac Stiofáin is not entirely reluctant to admit that there are times when the PIRA was weak or made mistakes – but it would be fair to suggest this claim may not represent the truth or the whole truth of the matter. At the other extreme, former PIRA member Joe Cahill (one of the founding members of the PIRA) stated categorically that poor training left new recruits underprepared which resulted in casualties being incurred on their side in the early years of the conflict:

There was an influx of volunteers into the IRA. There wasn't time to train them. There wasn't time to educate them. And I remember actually in '69 and '70, a lot of volunteers, their first training with weapons was when they went out to fire them.⁴⁹⁹

It is likely that experiences varied from individual to individual, but that Cahill's account is a fairer description of situation in the early 1970s. Still, training issued outside of the periods when the PIRA had a large influx of new recruits, when time pressures would be less intense comparatively, did not necessarily translate into tangible results. The 1973 report on the PIRA's rural activity concluded that that even the more advanced forms of training offered by the PIRA tended at that time to prove insufficient preparation for guerrilla warfare:

.... the [P]IRA do not seem to be able to apply the knowledge when they get back to their units. Their explosives knowledge is not good enough and they blow

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid., pp.192-193.

⁴⁹⁹ Quoted in White, *Out of the Ashes*, p.91.

themselves up. The only ways they learn effectively are by working with an expert or by slowly learning the hard way on operations.⁵⁰⁰

It is thought that ammunition shortages may have limited the amount of target practice that would have been offered to volunteers.⁵⁰¹ Former volunteer John Crawley suggests that firearms training was inadequate to a greater degree due to the lack of knowledge and experience of those delivering the training, the wide variety of weapons and ammunition that were used by the PIRA, failure to share the expertise of those who had prior military experience across the organisation, and lack of appetite for change among the leadership.⁵⁰² John Crawley account suggests that PIRA explosive's training was of a generally higher quality than firearms:

IRA training in explosives was good, although quite different to the training I'd received in the Marines when I was sent to demolitions school at Camp Lejeune.... The IRA were not trained to use formulas or in the precise application of explosives for tactical purposes. IRA training concentrated on the safe and correct use of improvised devices supplied by our engineering department. This department designed a wide variety of homemade mortars, rockets and booby traps that caused British forces in Ireland considerable difficulties. The movement had some very capable men and women developing these devices. Without them, the IRA would have been unable to inflict a fraction of the enemy casualties it did. Approximately half of the British soldiers killed between 1979 and the ceasefire of 1994 were killed in twelve bomb attacks. The training in this department was good because the IRA developed the devices themselves and knew them inside out. Our weakness was in the use of infantry weapons combined with little or no training in basic military tactics.⁵⁰³

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁰¹ Bishop and Mallie, *Provisional IRA*, p.169.

⁵⁰² Crawley, *The Yank*, pp. 41-45, 47-51, 58, 71, 80, 86, 88-89, 102-104, 130.

⁵⁰³ Crawley, *The Yank*, pp. 56-57.

Other sources agree with Crawley's claims. Procuring and smuggling weapons was challenging, and the PIRA had a varied arsenal of firearms that required a wider variety of ammunition as a result:

Ammunition was a quartermaster's nightmare...the main problem was the different calibres needed for all the different weapons: .300 for the MI's and Garands; .303 for the Lee-Enfields;...7.52 for the odd SLR and FN we had got hold of; .45 for the Thompsons and 9mm. for the other sub-machine guns. Then on top of that there were all the various pistol ammunitions from the tiny .25 to the .44 magnum.⁵⁰⁴

The implication of the varied nature of the PIRA's arsenal was that volunteers could find themselves being issued a weapon to use for a particular assault that they had not yet had any experience with. Eamon Collins memoir claims that soon after their initial training (in 1983), his cousin, Micky, was issued a gun to use in an operation that they had not used before – a Browning 9mm Automatic pistol.⁵⁰⁵

A PIRA volunteer with inadequate training and inexperience could take actions, or manufacture weapons that were highly dangerous to themselves or those around them. Off-target and stray bullets fired by the PIRA claimed the lives of their own members. Tony Henderson was accidentally shot at an IRA training camp near Portlaoise on 4 April 1971,⁵⁰⁶ and 15-year-old Michael McGee was accidentally shot by the PIRA on 13 May 1972.⁵⁰⁷ Off-target gunfire could also claim the lives of civilians.⁵⁰⁸ For instance, the PIRA fatally

⁵⁰⁴ McGuire, *To Take to Arms*, p.36.

⁵⁰⁵ Collins, *Killing Rage*, p.108

⁵⁰⁶ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 70; *Belfast Graves*, p.73.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, reference: 354; *Belfast Graves*, p.92.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, references: 119, 155, 184, 190, 225, 324, 347, 386, 482-483, 542, 858, 922, 960-961, 989, 1426, 1508, 1858, 1985, 2052.

wounded 27-year-old Brigid Carr on 23 November 1971 when they opened fire on a group of soldiers that were working to build a ramp close to the Strabane border post (Co.Tyrone) that was just ahead of where she had been walking at the time.⁵⁰⁹ The PIRA shot and killed 68-year-old Charles McNeill under similar circumstances on 14 August 1972. The pensioner had been standing on the doorstep of his property when the PIRA opened fire on a group of soldiers from the First Light Infantry Regiment, who were attempting to rescue a wounded soldier from the Jamaica Street and Etna Drive area of North Belfast – and was fatally wounded by PIRA bullets as result.⁵¹⁰

Other volunteers died because they did not understand precisely how their weapons worked. The 19-year-old PIRA volunteer who had been staying away on active service in England with Brian Fox on 21 December 1974 was certain that Fox had not expected to be killed when, moments before the pair were due to go to bed, he loaded a single bullet into the bottom chamber of the cylinder of a .38 American-manufactured double-action revolver, put the gun to his head and pulled the trigger twice.⁵¹¹ His death by misadventure was attributed to him having lacked ‘elementary knowledge’ of the weapon that was in his possession by the coroner at the inquest into their death.⁵¹² Gerald Logue, like Bernard Fox, was reported to have died after accidentally shooting themselves, on 22 March 1987.⁵¹³

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., reference: 184.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., reference: 542.

⁵¹¹ Ibid., reference: 1286.

⁵¹² Ibid.; *Belfast Graves*, p.123; ‘IRA man shot himself in England’, *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 7 January 1975, p.3.

⁵¹³ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 2815.

Lack of skills or experience in bomb making or laying could also result in casualties when the PIRA mishandled explosive material or IEDs.⁵¹⁴ 105 paramilitaries (15 loyalist, 90 republican) were killed by their own devices between 1969 and 1980.⁵¹⁵ Four members of the PIRA were killed on 9 March 1972 when the bomb they were assembling in a house on Clonard Street in the Falls Road area of West Belfast exploded prematurely.⁵¹⁶ Civilians were also sometimes killed alongside the PIRA when bombs exploded prematurely. It is thought that the PIRA IED that exploded prematurely killing four members of the Belfast PIRA's second battalion and four civilians on 28 May 1972, detonated as it was being lifted in or out of the boot of a recently hijacked vehicle that was parked on Anderson Street in the Short Strand area in East Belfast.⁵¹⁷

These explosions could be so ferocious that it was hard to identify how many people had been killed, or precisely what actions they might have taken to inadvertently cause the blast. However, it is reported that there were occasions when PIRA volunteers survived their injuries long enough to advise their comrades the fatal mistakes that they had made. Jack McCabe is said to have managed to tell fellow PIRA members that the explosion that claimed his life on 30 December 1971 had occurred when the metal shovel he was using to mix explosives in a garage on Swords Road in the Santry district area of Dublin, caused a spark that ignited the materials.⁵¹⁸

⁵¹⁴ Ibid., references: 23, 31, 37, 229, 932, 934, 1279.

⁵¹⁵ Steve Smith, *3-2-1 Bomb Gone: Fighting Terrorist Bombers in Northern Ireland* (Stroud, 2006), pp.94-95.

⁵¹⁶ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 298-301.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., references: 376-383.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid., reference: 229.

There is further evidence to suggest that the PIRA attempted to learn from their mistakes and take actions that reduced the likelihood of collateral damage occurring in the future. For example, IED misfires were one of the principal reasons why the PIRA worked to develop new iterations of their bombs and mortars over time, and there is some evidence to suggest that the PIRA undertook post-operation reviews to identify critical errors that had been made on some occasions. It is noted in the memoir of a former PIRA volunteer that there were internal investigations following the Birmingham pub bombings.⁵¹⁹ There is also reason to believe that the PIRA conducted a similar internal investigation following less high-profile incidents when civilian casualties were caused. A report of an internal investigation the PIRA conducted regarding the actions that resulted in a civilian, John Lundy, being fatally shot by a stray bullet that was fired by a volunteer during an exchange of gunfire with soldiers in the Short Strand area of Belfast on 13 November 1973 was found several years later (June 1976) in an attic of a bar in the local area, and played a critical role in the arrest and eventual conviction of one of the gunmen involved.⁵²⁰

Figure 3.6 demonstrates that the annual number of civilians and PIRA volunteers killed by the PIRA, who have been categorised as collateral damage and ‘own goals’ respectively – tragic outcomes that were undesirable for the PIRA for reasons that were outlined in part I thesis – peaked in 1972 and generally declined over time. The fact that most of these

⁵¹⁹ Conway, *Southside Provisional*, pp.178-179.

⁵²⁰ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference 960.

fatalities occurred when the organisation was in its infancy, indicates that there is an extent to which the armed struggle matured over time.

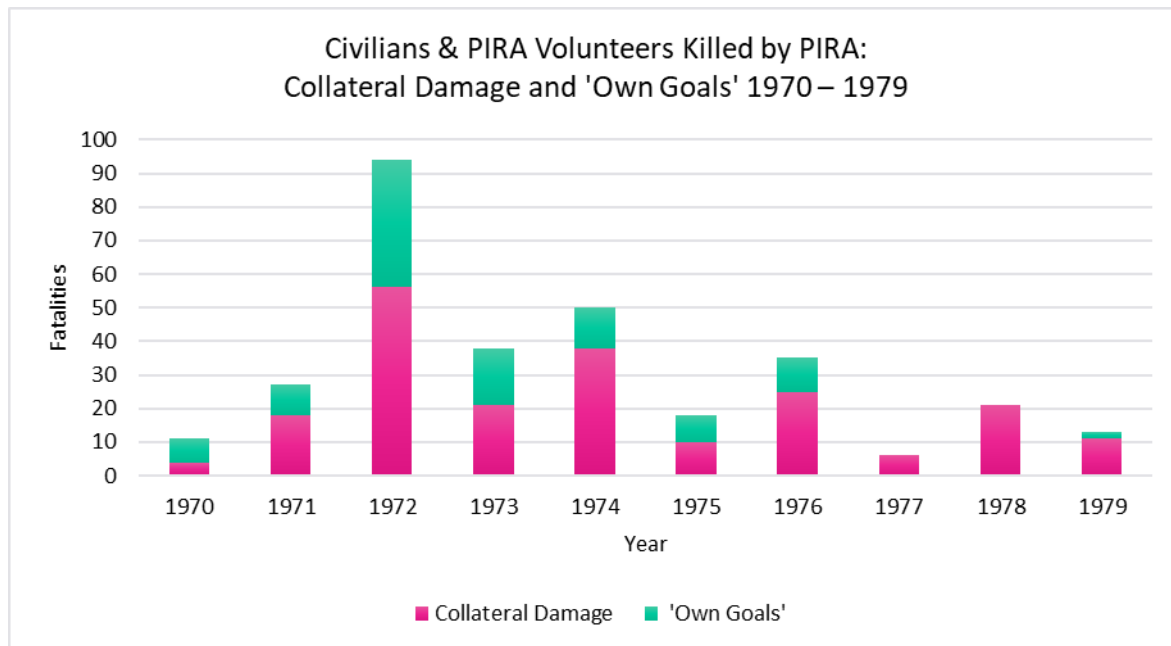


Figure 3.6 Civilians & PIRA Volunteers Killed by PIRA: Collateral Damage and 'Own Goals' 1970 – 1979.

Source: Kowalski, DPhil Dataset.

However, former volunteer John Crawley suggests in his memoir that post-operation reviews were quite rare and argues that more often than not the PIRA leadership failed to take the opportunity to learn from past mistakes.⁵²¹ What is more, both collateral damage and 'own goals' continue to result from PIRA action throughout the armed struggle. For all these reasons the PIRA's learning-curve is an inadequate explanation for the collateral damage that resulted from the armed struggle over time, and the subject of collateral damage is revisited in part III of the thesis.

⁵²¹ Crawley, *The Yank*, p.227.

COIN Policy and Practice and the Armed Struggle

The COIN policies and practices that were employed against the PIRA were constantly under review, often redeveloped in line with how PIRA weapons and tactics had evolved and had a significant influence on the way the armed struggle changed over time, consequently.

If the PIRA's ability to prepare and perpetrate violence was subject to the number of volunteers they managed to recruit and train, then it was also affected when volunteers were arrested or convicted for the crimes they committed on its behalf. Data regarding the number of PIRA members who were incarcerated annually is aggregate and incomplete. However, it does seem to indicate that arrests and convictions were a persistent but fairly consistent burden for the PIRA because the annual figures seem to fluctuate approximately in line with the number of people that were active in the organisation. Figure 3.7, for example, demonstrates that there was a slight decrease in the number of people that were charged with security-related offences in Northern Ireland annually between 1973 to 1979, and PIRA membership is thought to have decreased gradually in the same period. Figure 3.8 indicates that there was always a higher number of Catholics than Protestants charged for security-related crimes at this time, and that the ratio of Catholics to Protestants charged per month remained fairly constant – meaning that there is no obvious obstacle to assuming that the change over time demonstrated in figure 3.7 would be significantly undermined by this variable.

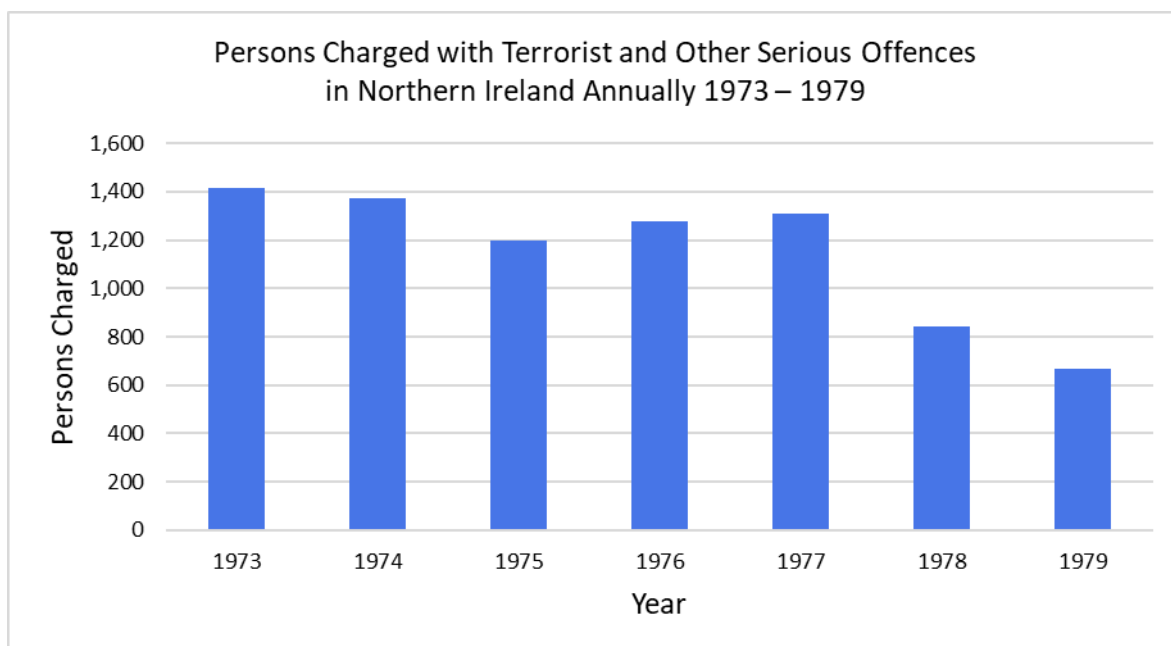


Figure 3.7 Persons Charged with Terrorist & Other Serious Offences in Northern Ireland Annually 1973 – 1979.

Sources: 'Charges, Monthly' in 'Security Statistics: weekly, monthly' (1976-1977), PRONI, NIO/14/1; 'Table NI-SEC-09: Number of people charged with terrorist and other serious offences (numbers), 1969-2003', CAIN, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ni/security/security.htm>, (21/03/2022).

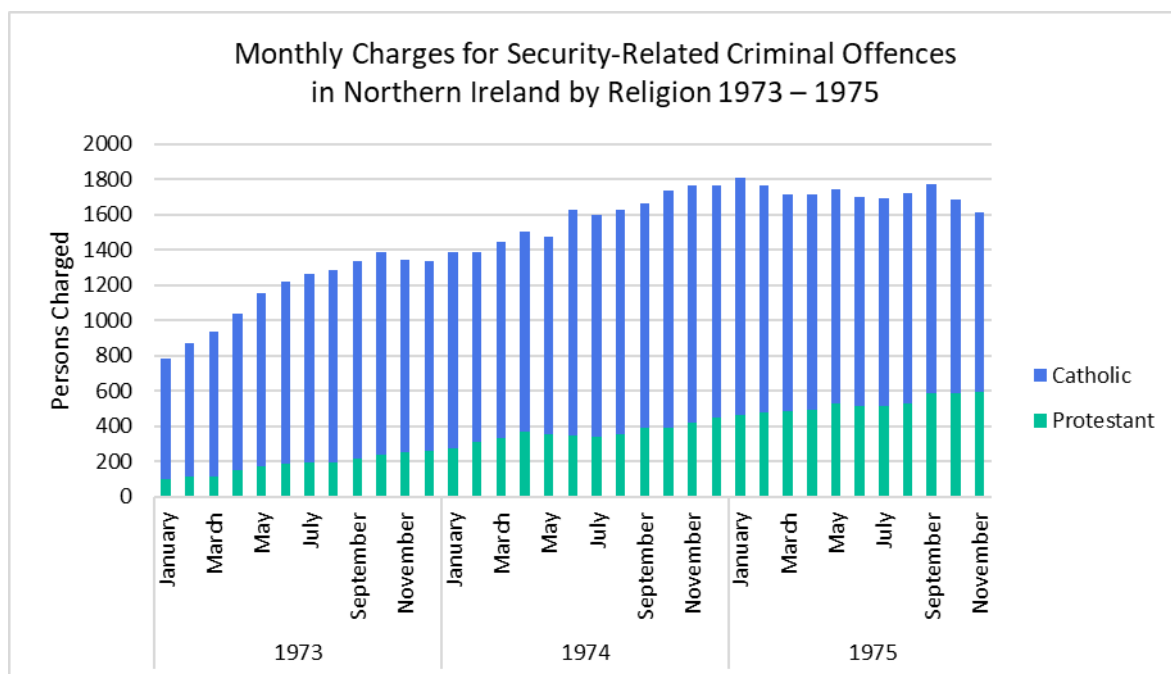


Figure 3.8. Monthly Charges for Security-Related Criminal Offences in Northern Ireland by Religion 1973 – 1979.

Sources: figures for 'terrorists out of action' in 'Statistics by Month Since July 1972', David Barzilay, Volume 4 pp.232-235.

The armed struggle was also affected by COIN policies or practices which impeded their access to weapons or diminished the supplies they had already acquired. Legal changes were introduced to thwart the PIRA's access to resources over time. Legislation was brought in to tighten controls for the manufacturing, selling, purchasing, and use of commercial explosives in Northern Ireland between 1970 and 1974. For example, from 19 May 1970 organisations with legitimate reasons to manufacture, sell, purchase, or use commercial explosives had to have permission from, and report all transactions or uses to the chief of police.⁵²² Regulations regarding who could use explosives within a legitimate company were tightened in December 1971.⁵²³ And from 1 Jan 1974 it became an offence to store explosives overnight.⁵²⁴ The PIRA's endeavours to access commercial explosives were never entirely thwarted but they were forced to manufacture homemade explosives (HME) for the majority of their landmine campaign after this time.

Legislative changes also extended controls on substances that could be used to manufacture HME in the same period. After May 1970 it was necessary for companies with a legitimate reason to manufacture or use Ammonium Nitrate (and nitrate mixtures) to have a licence (issued by the ministry of home affairs).⁵²⁵ In 1972 legislation was brought in to allow the government to prohibit the manufacture, sale or use of substances that might be used to

⁵²² Explosives Act (Northern Ireland) 1970, 1970 Chapter 10, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/apni/1970/10/contents>, (14/05/2021).

⁵²³ It was now the responsibility of employers to make sure that any employees who fired a shot (i.e. used explosives) are over 21, eligible under the laws, and registered in the official log, under: The Explosives Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1971 No. 332, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisro/1971/332/contents/made>, (14/05/2021).

⁵²⁴ Previously, licence holders could store a limited amount without express (exceptional) permission. The Explosives (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1973, 1973 No. 474, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisro/1973/474/contents/made>, (14/05/2021).

⁵²⁵ The Explosives Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1970, 1970 No. 110, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisro/1970/110/contents/made>, (14/05/2021).

make explosives entirely.⁵²⁶ Subsequently, specific controls were introduced to control ammonium nitrate, sodium chlorate or certain mixtures of ammonium nitrate in Northern Ireland, and similar controls were introduced in the Republic of Ireland soon afterwards.⁵²⁷ These laws will have posed some challenge to the PIRA. Still, it is evident that the PIRA was able to operate in spite of them, because they continued produce and use HME throughout their campaign.

The armed struggle was affected when weapons were seized or put beyond use. Several large weapons consignments were seized before they reached the PIRA in the 1970s.⁵²⁸

⁵²⁶ Explosives (Northern Ireland) Order 1972 (revoked), 1972 No. 730 (N.I. 3), <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1972/730/contents>, (14/05/2021).

⁵²⁷ Ammonium nitrate and sodium chlorate were controlled in Northern Ireland (NI) after 1 June 1972, and Republic of Ireland (ROI) from 10 Aug 1972; nitro-benzene was controlled in NI from 7 September 1971, and ROI from 23 September 1972; sodium chlorite or any mixture or solution' was controlled in NI after 15 December 1973; potassium nitrate and sodium nitrate was controlled in NI after 2 April 1974 (extending to sodium nitrate or any mixture or solution in 1976), and controlled in ROI after 1 August 1986. The Explosives Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1972, (1972 No. 118), https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisro/1972/118/pdfs/nisro_19720118_en.pdf, (13/05/2021); Explosives (Ammonium Nitrate and Sodium Chlorate) Order, 1972, S.I. No. 191/1972, <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/1972/en/si/0191.html?q=Explosives>, (14/05/2021); The Explosives (No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1972, (1972 No. 218) https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisro/1972/218/pdfs/nisro_19720218_en.pdf, (13/05/2021); Explosives (Nitro-Benzene) Order, 1972, S.I. No. 233/1972, <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/1972/en/si/0233.html?q=Explosives>, (14/05/2021); The Explosives Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1973, 1973 No. 463, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisro/1973/463/contents/made>, (14/05/2021); The Explosives Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1974, 1974 No. 32, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/1974/32/contents/made>, (14/05/2021); The Explosives Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1976, 1976 No. 51, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/1976/51/contents/made>, (14/05/2021); Explosives (Potassium Nitrate and Sodium Nitrate) Order, 1986, S.I. No. 273/1986: <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/1986/en/si/0273.html?q=Explosives>, (14/05/2021).

⁵²⁸ According to Boyle, 'Uncovering the IRA': Six suitcases full of small arms and ammo that had landed by ship from USA were seized by police at Dublin port in 1971. A shipment of 4.5 tons of small arms from Czechoslovakia were seized at Schiphol Airport in 1971. A consignment of Czech-made arms supplied by Colonel Ghaddafi – consisting of 250 AK-47 rifles and other material – was seized by Irish authorities in 1973. US Treasury Dept agents foiled a plot to smuggle an IRA cargo of 100 rifles that were bought at a Maryland gun shop in the USA to Ireland in 1974. A large consignment of arms that was supplied to the PIRA by Al Fatah section of the Palestine liberation movement (PLO) – containing 27 AK-47s assault rifles, 29 sub-machine guns, 7 (RPG-7) rocket launchers, 2 Bren guns, grenades, ammunition and explosives – was seized at Antwerp in 1977. And a cargo of more than 150 guns (including two M-60 general purpose (or 'heavy') machine guns) and 60,000 rounds of ammo that were being smuggled from the USA to Ireland by ship was seized at Dublin port by police in 1979.

Other weapons were captured at a later stage, for example, when the PIRA's weapons stores were found and raided by the security forces. And some of the bombs that the PIRA planted were neutralised by the security forces before the intended death or destruction was caused. Data on this subject is also incomplete and aggregate. It provides some degree of insight, nevertheless. Figures 3.9 and 3.10 demonstrate that weapon and ammunition finds increased in the early 1970s, peaked in 1972, and decreased over time. Figure 3.11 shows that approximately a third of all devices planted in Northern Ireland were neutralised and the volume of explosions that did occur annually, decreased after 1972. This implies that weapons seizures and disposal by the security forces can potentially again be understood as having placed a persistent but consistent burden on the armed struggle in this period. This is because annual number of weapons seizures fluctuated broadly in line with the annual number of bombing and shooting attacks that were perpetrated by the PIRA (see figure 3.2 and 3.3 above).

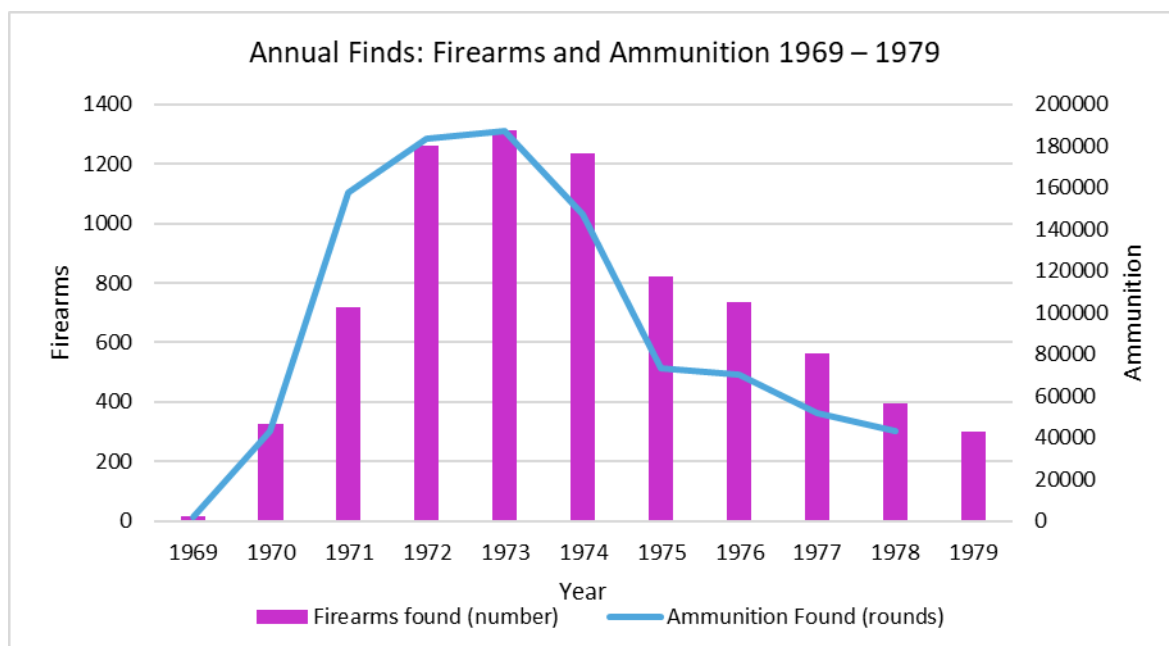


Figure 3.9 Annual Finds: Firearms and Ammunition 1969 – 1979

.Sources: Table NI-SEC-07: Firearms, and explosive finds in Northern Ireland (only), 1969-2003', CAIN, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ni/security/security.htm>, (21/03/2022); 'Stats: Up to 26 March, 1980', in Barzilay , Volume 4, p.232.

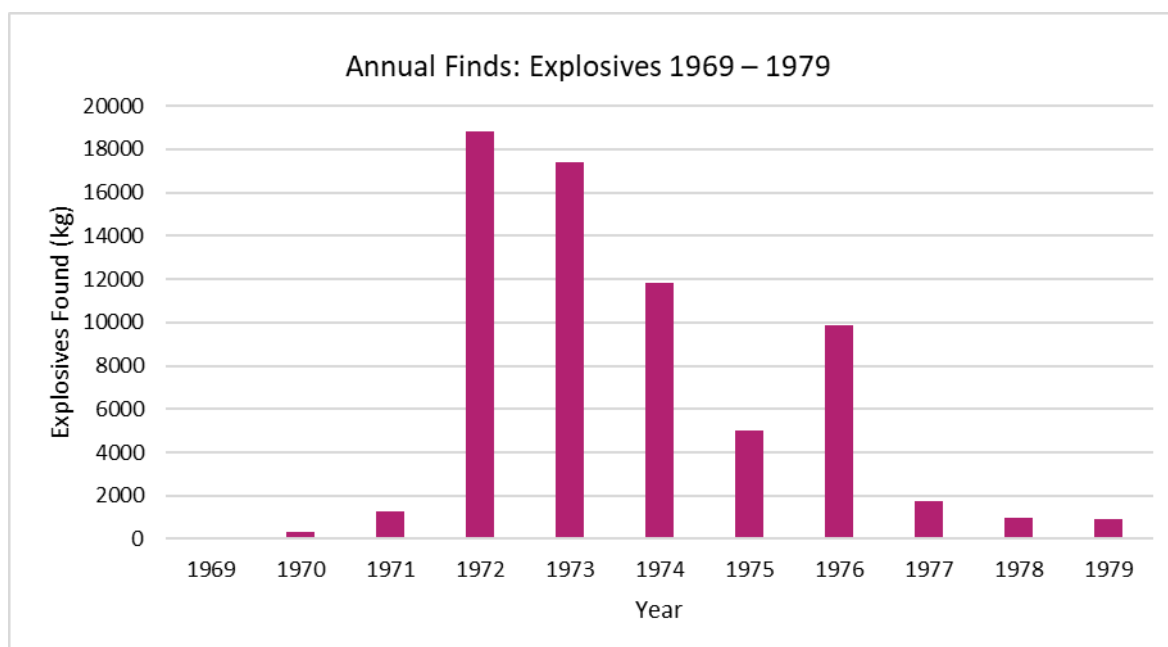


Figure 3.10 Annual Finds: Explosives 1969 – 1979.

Sources: Table NI-SEC-07: Firearms, and explosive finds in Northern Ireland (only), 1969-2003', CAIN (Conflict Archive on the INternet), <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ni/security/security.htm>, (21/03/2022).

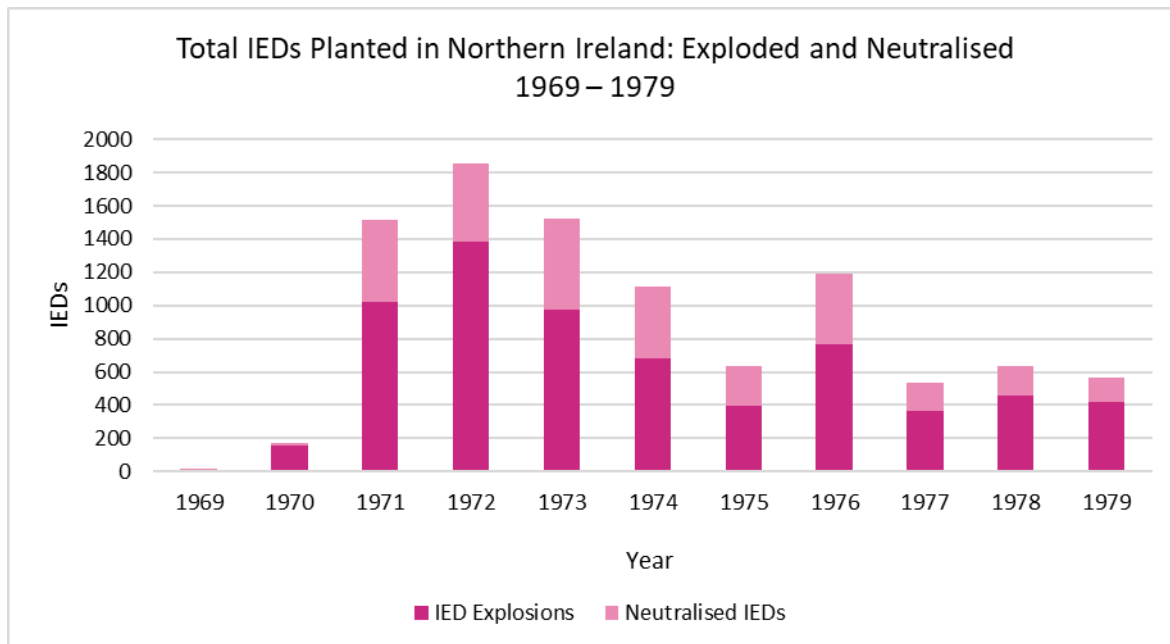


Figure 3.11 Total IEDs Planted in Northern Ireland: Exploded and Neutralised 1969 – 1979.

Sources: Table NI-SEC-06: Security related incidents (number) in Northern Ireland (only), shootings, bombings, and incendiaries, 1969 to 2003', CAIN, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ni/security/security.htm>, (21/03/2022); 'Stats: Up to 26 March, 1980', Barzilay, *Volume 4*, p.232.

Police and military clothing, vehicles, and buildings were redeveloped or reinforced and wider changes to police and military practices were introduced to reduce the risk that was posed by the PIRA over time. There is an extent to which these changes were successful. However, the evidence suggests that the story of the relationship between these upgrades and the extent to which PIRA attacks proved lethal, is further complicated for at least two reasons. Firstly, there were occasions when the PIRA went on to adapt their weapons or tactics further to counter the countermeasures that had just been introduced to thwart them. And secondly, there is evidence to suggest that the procedures that were introduced to protect to police officers and soldiers were not always adhered to.

The flak jacket – a vest that was relatively impervious to low-calibre weapons – was introduced to protect RUC officers from 28 February 1971.⁵²⁹ There are instances when it is clear that the flak jacket saved lives.⁵³⁰ They include that of a soldier who was shot at while they were on-duty at a security checkpoint in Derry on 17 January 1976.⁵³¹ However, there are other occasions when it is reported that RUC or military lives might have been saved if only sufficient flak jackets had been available.⁵³²

The vehicles used by the security forces offered the police and soldiers travelling inside them varying degrees of protection against PIRA assaults. Police and military Land Rovers were reinforced over time but both they and unmarked police cars were regularly breached by PIRA bombs and bullets. 79 members of the security forces lost their lives as a result of 52 attacks on such vehicles by the PIRA during the 1970s.⁵³³

The Ferret was a two-man, four-wheel-drive, light armoured car, that was fast but inherently more vulnerable to attack than vehicles with more armour.⁵³⁴ The vehicle was used less frequently over time due to the high toll of security force fatalities that resulted from PIRA attacks upon it. Between October 1971 and March 1973, nine soldiers were killed

⁵²⁹ Deutsch and Magowan, *Volume 1*, pp.95, 183; Dewar, *The British Army*, pp.194-196.

⁵³⁰ 'Saved by Flak Jacket', *Belfast Telegraph*, 12 April 1974, p.4.

⁵³¹ His colleague, Gunner Mark Ashford was sadly killed in the same attack. McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 1587. Another example is the reference to a Soldier from the Coldstream Guards having had their life save thanks to their flak jacket on 14 September 1972. *Ibid.*, reference: 720.

⁵³² *Ibid.*, reference: 948.

⁵³³ *Ibid.*, references: 79, 157, 211-212, 238, 240-242, 267-268, 271, 306, 365, 387, 389-390, 396, 414-416, 421, 458, 464-465, 475, 528-529, 649, 659, 732, 774-775, 816-817, 830, 973, 801, 1024, 1036, 1045, 1068, 1180, 1300, 1525, 1565, 1652-1654, 1660, 1672, 1832, 1899, 1911-1912, 1938-1940, 1946-1947, 1963, 2005, 2028-2029, 2036, 2043, 2092-2095, 2097, 2127-2128, 2174, 2183, 2187-2190.

⁵³⁴ Barzilay, *Volume 1*, p.88; Barzilay, *Volume 3*, pp.72-74.

in seven PIRA attacks on armoured Ferret cars.⁵³⁵ The fact that there was only one other fatal attack on a Ferret car in this decade (in 1977) demonstrates that the military could, and to some degree did thwart PIRA operations by moving away from less vulnerable vehicles over time.⁵³⁶ Nevertheless, it is clear that the PIRA had some degree of success in their endeavours to maim and kill those inside of even the most heavily armoured vehicles that were used.

The one-ton Humber armoured car provided more protection than the quarter-ton Land Rover but could still be penetrated by armour-piercing rounds. The significance of this was apparent on 17 March 1974, when Corporal Cyril John Wilson was killed by this kind of bullet piercing the skin of the Humber carrying him.⁵³⁷ Other vehicles such as the Saracen or Saladin heavy armoured car provided greater protection to those travelling inside.⁵³⁸ Still, the PIRA was able to penetrate these vehicles with powerful IEDs on four occasions in the 1970s.⁵³⁹

By the mid-1970s the security forces kept road travel in South Armagh to a minimum and preferred to transport soldiers by helicopter.⁵⁴⁰ The volume of security-force casualties that occurred in-transit was far lower than they might have been otherwise due to this process change. However, there were a couple of instances when PIRA attacks (directly or

⁵³⁵ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 146,161, 353-354,410, 479-480, 563, 813.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, reference: 1909.

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*, references: 1037.

⁵³⁸ Barzilay, *Volume 1*, pp.89-90; Barzilay, *Volume 3*, pp.72-74.

⁵³⁹ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 586-588, 760, 1492, 2136.

⁵⁴⁰ Harnden, *Bandit Country*, p.19; Barzilay, *Volume 2*, pp.178-184.

indirectly) contributed to fatal helicopter crashes. The PIRA claimed to have 'shot down' the military helicopter that crashed near Crossmaglen (Co. Armagh) killing the Commanding Officer of the Royal Green Jackets, Iain D. Corden-Lloyd on 17 February 1978.⁵⁴¹ To be more precise, it would appear that this crash occurred because the helicopter was taking evasive action after it came under fire. Much later in their campaign (19 March 1994) the PIRA brought down a British Army Lynx helicopter that was hovering approximately 100 feet above a landing pad when the Mark 15 mortar round they fired at it hit the tail of the aircraft.⁵⁴²

Police stations and military bases were reinforced to bolster them against PIRA attacks. Sandbagged Sangurs were added to provide concealed look-out positions, and windows were reinforced with bars or bulletproof glass. Other measures were taken to adapt buildings to defend against discreet challenges that new PIRA weapons or tactics posed. For example, heavy duty netting was stretched above military bases to catch the mortar rounds that were fired at them by the PIRA – a measure that proved effective on several occasions. For example, five of the ten (PIRA Mark 8) mortar rounds fired at the joint RUC/military base at Crossmaglen on 30 August 1976 were caught (unexploded) by the protective netting which was stretched above the building.⁵⁴³ Lieutenant-Colonel Derrick Patrick, who was involved in disarming the mortar rounds on this occasion, makes clear in his memoir *Fetch*

⁵⁴¹ Dewar, *The British Army*, pp.155-156; February 1978 in 'NIO Summary 1977-1978', TNA, CJ 4/2297; McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 1991.

⁵⁴² Harnden, *Bandit Country*, p.398.

⁵⁴³ 11 – 17 August 1973 in 'NIO Summary 1973', TNA, CJ 4/1024; August 1976 in 'NIO Summary 1975-1976', TNA, CJ 4/1237; Smith, *3-2-1 Bomb Gone*, p.137; Barzilay, *Volume 3*, pp.74-76.

Felix (1981) that the process of removing and disarming the live rounds from the netting was nevertheless a difficult and highly dangerous task.⁵⁴⁴

New procedures were introduced (or at least advised) to keep soldiers and police officers safer during the conflict. Some procedural changes were relatively simple but could prove effective, nevertheless. For example, it was strongly advised that security-force personnel check underneath their personal vehicles before driving, when it became apparent that the PIRA was attaching bombs on the underside of them. This simple check is reported to have saved lives on many occasions. A police officer in County Down was said to have escape injury on 15 December 1973 because he checked the underside of his car and spotted the device had been attached to it to target him.⁵⁴⁵ The fact that a detective-constable was killed, and another police officer lost his legs to under vehicle bombs planted in the same area on the same evening suggests that this check had not become habitual for all security force personnel at this time.

The under-car check was not sufficient to save lives from PIRA bombs later in the conflict, however, because the PIRA updated their car-bomb tactics over time. The fatal car-bomb attack on part-time UDR lance-corporal William Gordon at Grove Terrace, Maghera (Co. Derry) on 8 February 1978 is an example of when evolved tactics were used to deadly effect. A neighbour witnessed the event and gave testimony at the inquest into the death of the

⁵⁴⁴ Lieutenant-Colonel Derrick Patrick OBE, *Fetch Felix: The Fight Against the Ulster Bombers 1976-1977* (London, 1981), pp.51-60.

⁵⁴⁵ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 977.

part-time UDR man.⁵⁴⁶ She explained to the court that on that morning she remembered seeing William Gordon check underneath and inside of the boot of his car – as he always did – just before his children got into the car to be taken to school by him. However, Gordon was not to know that on this occasion, the PIRA had gone to greater lengths to conceal the bomb they had planted to target him from easy view: hiding it in the cavity between the mud-wing (driver's side) of the car and the bulkhead of the cabin. The device, which was designed to be triggered when the vehicle was driven, exploded after the car began to move, killing both the UDR-man and his 10-year-old daughter Lesley, and causing serious injuries to his 8-year-old son who had been riding in the back of the car at the time.

There were several letter bombs that were successfully dismantled between June and September 1973, thanks to caution on the part of those responsible for handling post at police stations or military bases (including one that was detected by an x-ray scan of a suspect parcel sent to Omagh RUC station on 26 September 1973).⁵⁴⁷ However, PIRA bombs that were concealed in letters and parcels claimed lives on other occasions. On 3 October 1973, Second Lieutenant Lindsay William Hamilton Dobbie was killed when he opened a PIRA parcel bomb that had been hand-delivered to Bligh's Lane army post, and another soldier received serious head and facial injuries and lost a hand in the blast.⁵⁴⁸ The incident occurred the day after the RUC had issued a public warning about the danger of IRA letter

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., reference: 1987-1988.

⁵⁴⁷ 26 September 1973, reference: 14 in 'HQ3 Diary, September 73', TNA, WO 305/4217.

⁵⁴⁸ 'Mail bomb injures security officer', *Irish News*, 5 February 1974, p.1; McKittrick et al., *Lost Lives*, reference: 946.

bombs. The army specifically ordered an inquiry into the incident because the parcel was hand-delivered and represented a security breach.

The protective clothing, equipment and procedures that were worn and used by the Ammunition Technical Officers (ATOs) involved in bomb-disposal work were developed to provide a greater deal of protection to the ATO over time.⁵⁴⁹ Sniffer dogs proved an effective asset for finding the PIRA's weapons caches and landmines from the outset. For example, a 200lb culvert bomb, that otherwise may have been used to target a military vehicle, was found on the Belleek to Kesh Road and dismantled with the aid of a sniffer dog, on 23 May 1974.⁵⁵⁰ Robots (known as the 'wheelbarrow') became an essential part of the bomb-disposal process after they were introduced in 1972.⁵⁵¹ From 1972 onwards the bomb disposal unit protocols increased the period of time that they had to wait between any interaction they had with a device (known as the mandatory 'soak' period) to allow for the possibility that any actions they might have taken could have inadvertently triggered the count-down of a time-delay switch.⁵⁵² All of these changes are believed to have spared bomb-disposal experts from a significant degree of risk during the preliminary stages of their find and dismantle operations.

The memoirs of former ATOs who worked in Northern Ireland at the time make clear that the battle between themselves and the PIRA bombers was pretty persistent throughout the

⁵⁴⁹ Barzilay, *Volume 2*, pp.171-173.

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.189.

⁵⁵¹ Smith, *3-2-1 Bomb Gone*, pp.75-78.

⁵⁵² Macdonald, *Stopping the Clock*, pp.76-92.

period. For example, it is thought that as the IEDD teams became better able to neutralise the PIRA's time-operated IEDs before they exploded, that the PIRA started to shorten the length of the time-delay to increase the likelihood that they would explode and cause the intended material damage.⁵⁵³ Then the PIRA began to target the ATO directly, by including anti-handling and anti-lift elements in their devices.⁵⁵⁴ Later, when it was recognised that robots were being used to dismantle bombs, the PIRA began planting devices upstairs or on the upper deck of buses.⁵⁵⁵ And, when it became apparent that the PIRA was having success planting bombs in vehicles in city centres additional vehicle check points and traffic restrictions came into force.⁵⁵⁶

Material Factors and the Micro-Dynamics of the Armed Struggle

The armed struggle was the sum of many incidents of PIRA violence. There are times when PIRA operations appear to have occurred in an opportunistic manner, but most were planned ahead of time and were, therefore, designed to achieve a specific result. Each operation was to some extent unique. However, the evidence suggests that most were designed with three primary objectives in mind.

The first was to successfully strike the intended target. This might mean causing material damage to a building or inflicting fatal injuries upon a person. We know this was the case because the overarching strategy of the armed struggle (outlined in part I) centred on the

⁵⁵³ Ibid., p.138.

⁵⁵⁴ Smith, *3-2-1 Bomb Gone*, p. 112.

⁵⁵⁵ Macdonald, *Stopping the Clock*, p.139.

⁵⁵⁶ Barzilay, *Volume 2*, pp.163-164.

logic that acts of political violence against specific property and people would contribute to the eventual attainment of their political end-goals.

The second was to preserve their own interests. This meant to survive the assault, escape from the scene and, ideally, evade arrest or dodge conviction subsequently. There is no indication that the group subscribed to the belief that it was necessary or desirable for a volunteer to sacrifice their own life for the cause by adopting tactics that turn their suicide into a weapon. Former members make clear that would-be recruits were warned that participating in the armed struggle was dangerous and could result in their death or imprisonment, and the PIRA certainly venerated those who did go on to be killed 'in action' as heroes or martyrs. But this is not the same as having a culture of promoting suicide tactics, like the suicide-bomb tactic which has been used by other belligerents in other conflicts. To the contrary, the PIRA valued their own safety. What is more, the apparent contention that existed over republican prisoners' decision to embark on hunger strikes as a means of political protests, suggests that there would have been powerful disincentives for their choosing suicide-tactics outside of prison even if they had had an interest in the protocol.⁵⁵⁷

Finally, the third objective was to eliminate or minimise the risk that civilian casualties would occur (or would occur on a scale that exceeded the proportion of collateral damage that the organisation determined was an acceptable consequence of their actions in certain

⁵⁵⁷ The suicide-bomb tactic would, like the hunger strike protest tactic, very likely have been interpreted as a willing and conscious act of suicide and anathema, therefore, to orthodox Catholic principles.

scenarios). This was a critical objective quite simply because, as we saw in part I of this thesis, there was political incentive for the PIRA to endeavour to avoid causing public outrage, and civilian casualties were one of the most potent sources of this.

When we examine PIRA operations in detail we can identify several different ways that the PIRA strived to attain each of these objectives by adapting the design of their operations – the primary intention of this part of the thesis is to outline each of these, respectively. Before then, it is necessary to examine how the individual characteristics of different weapons, targets, and environments could play a role in the decisions the PIRA made in this regard, by providing either material advantages or disadvantages to the PIRA. It is worth noting at this stage, that the PIRA did not prioritise the three primary objectives equally or succeed to attain them on every occasion. The reasons how and why this was the case is examined in part III.

The Characteristics and Function of PIRA Weapons

It has already been established that the outcome of PIRA operations could be determined by the extent to which the PIRA acquired or manufactured weapons that were stable, handled said weapons appropriately, and fired them with precision. However, there are several other ways that the character of PIRA weapons could impact the design and outcome of PIRA operations. PIRA weapons varied in firepower, firing range, size, and weight, and involved different types of action to load or fire. These characteristics determined whether a weapon was more or less difficult to transport, conceal, or use effectively in different scenarios consequently.

The PIRA acquired and used a variety of firearms including handguns, shotguns, rifles, carbines, assault rifles, machine guns and submachine guns. The handguns they acquired had a short range of fire and held only a small number of rounds.⁵⁵⁸ For this reason, they were unsuitable for scenarios where the PIRA wanted to apply heavy or sustained gunfire. Pistols and revolvers were, however, adequate when the intended target was expected to be unarmed and shot at close range. Handguns were commonly used by the PIRA, for example, to execute the individuals they had abducted, interrogated, and had determined to be an informer; or the unarmed and unsuspecting people who they ambushed in public and private spaces. A few memoirs specifically mention that revolvers as opposed to pistols were preferred in this scenario because they believed the weapons were less likely to jam.⁵⁵⁹ An Astra .375 magnum revolver was used to kill an off-duty RUC inspector, Peter Flannagan, on 23 August 1974 in Broderick's Public House in Omagh (Co. Tyrone).⁵⁶⁰

Handguns were preferred in situations where concealment of the weapon was important. On 17 January 1976 PIRA gunmen mingled in amongst the crowd of shoppers queuing at a (pedestrian) military checkpoint to get close to their target – the group of three soldiers of the Royal Artillery Regiment that were on duty.⁵⁶¹ One of the men is said to have produced a revolver and started shooting at the soldiers as soon as they reached the front of the queue, before making their escape on foot in the direction of the Bogside. Gunner Mark

⁵⁵⁸ For example, two of the semi-automatic pistols that were known to be used by the PIRA in the 1970s included the 9mm Browning pistol (No.2 Mk1) and the 'Czech' Model 70 self-loading pistol in 7.65mm calibre which held between 8 and 13 rounds. Barzilay, *Volume 3*, p.192.

⁵⁵⁹ O'Callaghan, *The Informer*, p.10; Collins, *Killing Rage*, p.181.

⁵⁶⁰ O'Callaghan, *The Informer*, p.10; Barzilay, *Volume 3*, p.192.

⁵⁶¹ January 1976 in 'NIO Summary 1975-1976', TNA, CJ 4/1237; 14 – 28 January 1976 in 'NIO Summary 1974-1975', TNA, CJ 4/1787; Ken Wharton, *Northern Ireland: An Agony Continued: The British Army and the Troubles 1980-83* (Solihull, 2015), pp.192-193; McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 1587.

Ashford was killed in the ambush, a second soldier was injured in the arm, and a third was saved by his flak jacket.

John Crawley's memoir claims that in the early 1980s a request for 'tiny pistols' was smuggled from volunteers in the Crumlin Road Gaol (i.e., PIRA prisoners who were planning to orchestrate their escape) to those involved in purchasing arms for the PIRA in the US:

[Liam Ryan] proudly showed me the "comms" he had received from his cousin Pete while he was incarcerated in Crumlin Road. Comms were tiny messages written on fragile cigarette paper and wrapped in cellophane. They were smuggled out of prison and these ones had made their way to Liam in New York. The comms spoke of a planned escape and the urgent need to acquire tiny pistols that could be secretly carried into the prison. Liam duly obtained a few small automatics, .25 calibre if I recall correctly, and sent them to Ireland where they made their way into "The Crum" to allow the escape to proceed.⁵⁶²

Seán Mac Stiofáin noted his memoir that the weapons preferred by PIRA snipers included the 'Garand, Mark III or Mark IV .303 Lee-Enfield, or a hunting rifle, with a telescopic sight.'

⁵⁶³ These are models of battle rifle – long guns that are suitably chambered to fire a fully powered cartridge, up to and including rounds that can pierce body-armour, vehicles, or walls.⁵⁶⁴ Battle rifles will vary in the range they can be fired but those used by the PIRA in this period could generally provide a maximum effective range of around 800m.

The PIRA could achieve a greater rate of fire (number of rounds fired per minute) when they used a machine gun.⁵⁶⁵ An example of a machine gun operated by the PIRA is the M-60

⁵⁶² Crawley, *The Yank*, p.97.

⁵⁶³ Mac Stiofáin, *Memoirs*, p.302.

⁵⁶⁴ Barzilay, *Volume 3*, p.188-190; Patrick, *Fetch Felix*, p.32.

⁵⁶⁵ Machine guns are fully automatic firing which means that the gun is capable of firing more than one shot without manual reloading with the single function (pull) of the trigger. Machine guns can be crew operated (heavy machine guns) or operated by a single person (light machine guns) and can either be fed by a belt of ammunition or use a magazine.

machine gun (US origin) – it had a cyclical rate of 550 rounds per minute and an effective range of 800m.⁵⁶⁶ But like battle rifles, machine guns can be both heavy and large and would, therefore, be too cumbersome for use in situations where the PIRA wanted to be more agile. Carbines,⁵⁶⁷ assault rifles,⁵⁶⁸ and submachine guns (SMG)⁵⁶⁹ can also achieve a high rate of fire but are much smaller and lighter than either battle rifles or machine guns, by comparison. For this reason, they were more regularly used by the PIRA in medium or close-range shooting attacks on whole groups of armed soldiers or police who could potentially return fire or provide chase.

The bombs used by the PIRA also varied in power, size, and function. The PIRA used a variety of different types of explosives – each of which varied in power, stability, and shelf life.⁵⁷⁰ There are two main categories: low-explosives (LE) which burn and are less powerful, and high-explosives (HE), which detonate and are more powerful.⁵⁷¹ An improvised explosive device (IED) will be more or less able to cause destruction, easy or safe to

⁵⁶⁶ Dewar, *The British Army*, p.120; McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 2006, 2036, 2213, 2231, 2238, 2412-2414.

⁵⁶⁷ Carbines are shortened versions of full-length battle rifles. Most fire fully powered cartridges. Carbines known to have been used by the PIRA include: the .30 M1 carbine and the Chinese copy (Yype S6) SKS Carbine in 7.62 x 39mm calibre. Barzilay, *Volume 3*, p.188-190.

⁵⁶⁸ Assault rifles use intermediate cartridges and are expected to have a maximum effective range of 300-600m. They have a detachable magazine (the models used by PIRA commonly held 20 – 40 rounds), making them faster and easier to load. Examples used by the PIRA include: ArmaLite AR15 and the Avtomat Kalashnikova AK-47. Dewar, *The British Army*, p.120; Barzilay, *Volume 3*, p.189.

⁵⁶⁹ Submachine guns (SMG) use pistol cartridges which are low powered, but the weapons are deadly, nevertheless, due to the high rate of fire (number of rounds they fire a minute). Examples used by the PIRA include the Carl Gustav sub-machine gun which could achieve a rate of fire of between 450 and 1000 rounds per minute and had an effective range of around 100m, various models of the Thompson SMG, and the M.3 sub-machine gun (or 'grease gun'). Barzilay, *Volume 3*, p.188; Barzilay, *Volume 1*, p.130-131.

⁵⁷⁰ Macdonald, *Stopping the Clock*, pp.19-20.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid.

transport, possible to conceal, or likely to work predictably, depending on the type and amount of explosives that it contains.

A common or well-known type of low-explosive is gunpower. Devices which contain LE are called incendiaries and are generally use for anti-property purposes, such as causing material damage by fire. Small incendiaries are not said to pose a huge anti-personnel risk in and of themselves, according to accounts of experts, including P.G. Macdonald:

Unless you are holding an incendiary in your hand with your face pressed close to it, serious injury is well-nigh impossible. The explosive content is not much more than that of an ordinary box of household matches.⁵⁷²

High Explosives include ‘commercial’ and ‘military’ grade explosives.⁵⁷³ Commercial explosives have a shorter shelf life and are less stable than military grade explosives. The shelf life of commercial explosives is (and only needs to be) a few months – they are produced to be used for commercial purposes including quarrying. In the early 1970s commercial explosives such as Gelignite, Quarrex, and Greencast were legally manufactured and sold to be used for certain authorised purposes in Northern Ireland (such as quarrying and demolition) under the 1875 Explosives Act. The PIRA acquired these materials by stealing from or extorting those who were licenced to purchase them.⁵⁷⁴ Military grade explosives are (and need to be) the most powerful, stable, and long-lasting type of explosive.⁵⁷⁵ Semtex is a military grade explosive that was acquired and used by the PIRA

⁵⁷² Gurney, *Braver Men Walk Away: Memoirs of the World’s Top Bomb-Disposal Expert*, Kindle edition (2016), chapter 7.

⁵⁷³ Macdonald, *Stopping the Clock*, pp.19-20.

⁵⁷⁴ It is possible they also had some willing donors. Oppenheimer, *The IRA*, pp.184-185.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid.

after 1980. The literature suggests that 1kg of Semtex will destroy an average semi-detached residential property from the inside, and that just 250g of the substance was used in the device that brought down a Pan Am passenger aircraft in 1988.⁵⁷⁶

The PIRA also manufactured and used homemade explosives (HME) for their IED campaign. HME are substances that have been made from materials that have not been manufactured for that purpose initially – such as fertiliser or weed killer. HME is the least powerful and least stable type of explosive and has the shortest shelf-life.⁵⁷⁷ According to A. R. Oppenheimer the PIRA would need 300lb (163kg) of HME to match 200lb (91kg) of Gelignite – a commercial explosive.⁵⁷⁸

Throughout the full duration of their campaign the PIRA used each type of explosive, in various quantities and combinations to serve a variety of different purposes. Often, PIRA IEDs used a combination of different materials to boost its explosive power or add an incendiary or shrapnel effect.⁵⁷⁹ The nature of an IED is also determined by other components of the device including, for example, the firing switch (i.e., the mechanism is used to set-off the bomb). The PIRA's IEDs worked in different ways and had different military advantages or disadvantages for the user, depending on the type firing-mechanism that was involved.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid., p.187.

⁵⁷⁷ Although not a form of 'high explosive' HME can achieve low-order detonation when boosted by a substance that is. Low-order detonation describes the situation whereby the material has not fully decomposed. Macdonald, *Stopping the Clock*, pp.19-20.

⁵⁷⁸ Oppenheimer, *The IRA*, p.187.

⁵⁷⁹ Fuel oil was often combined with homemade explosives to boost the incendiary effect, and small pieces of metal or nails (shrapnel) were included to make pipe bombs more deadly.

Command wire or radio-control initiated IEDs (CWIED and RCIED, respectively) are fired by the pressing of a switch or plunger that was either physically attached to the device via a length of (command) wire or communicated with it wirelessly by utilising the electromagnetic spectrum (i.e., via radio waves). As such, both CWIED and RCIEDs provided the PIRA with scope to perpetrate violence with control (over the timing) and to do so, from a distance. The distance between the PIRA volunteer who fired the device (the firing point) and the explosive materials that were used to attack their target could vary: CWIEDs and RCIEDs were regularly fired from distances ranging from 100 – 300 metres away from the site of impact but could be detonated from a significantly further away.⁵⁸⁰

Time-operated IEDs (TOIEDs) are bombs that function after a pre-set time delay (a countdown). By design, a TOIED provided the PIRA with the scope to put some degree of distance between themselves and their weapon before it exploded – by walking, running or driving away after they initiate the count-down; how far, could depend on how long the count-down had been set for (or was expected to take). The time-delay duration was set or determined in a variety of different ways. Moreover, a TOIED firing switch could be igniferous, chemical, mechanical or electric. The time-operated IEDs (TOIED) used at the beginning of the decade were less accurate than those used later in the campaign.

An igniferously initiated TOIED is a bomb which will explode after the expiration of a length of burning safety fuse, that is manually lit by the perpetrator. The time-delay duration is

⁵⁸⁰ See for example McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 1492 (was approximately 100 yards), and 801 (which was several hundred yards).

determined by the length of safety fuse that has been attached – a short length (or short-fuse bomb) might only take seconds to burn – and affected whether the PIRA decided to sprint or walk away after lighting it. The expected time-delay could be estimated (by testing the burn time of different lengths of fuse) but was never guaranteed to be entirely precise.

The PIRA also used TOIEDs that were fired by a chemical process. The first chemical-initiated incendiary was used soon after in April 1970. These incendiary devices would fire when the sulphuric acid it contained came into contact with an incendiary mixture of sodium chlorate and sugar; and would fire after said sulphuric acid had eaten through the rubber condom that contained it. This process took around an hour (but could vary depending on the quantities of chemicals involved) – which was sufficient for the PIRA bomb planter to consider walking away after activating it, in a calm and unnoticed manner. Chemical IEDs were often fully assembled before being transported to the location they PIRA was to target but the acid was contained within a wax coated and wax sealed test tube within the condom to prevent the corrosive process from initiating prematurely, which the bomb planter would disrupt when they wanted to commence the count-down.⁵⁸¹

This type of device was described by a PIRA bomb maker who was interviewed by William Hoover Van Vorris in 1974 as ‘very safe, providing there are no leaks in the wax.’⁵⁸² It seems highly unsuitable to describe a weapon that is designed to cause fires in a commercial property as safe. But, given the volume of devices of this kind that were planted by the PIRA

⁵⁸¹ Patrick, *Fetch Felix*, pp.35-36.

⁵⁸² ‘Denotation Expert’ quoted in W. H. Van Vorris, *Violence in Ulster: An Oral Documentary* (Massachusetts, 1975), p.237.

that functioned as they had intended, it is perhaps fair to suggest that the interviewee at least believed what they were saying.

A common firing switch used in TOIEDs manufactured by the PIRA in the early 1970s involved a clothes peg with drawing board pins inserted into each side of the jaw to act as electrical contacts to fire the device when the jaws of the peg closed.⁵⁸³ To create the time-delay, the jaws of this pin/peg contraption were held apart by wrapping a length of solder wire around the feet of the peg which would give way over a period. The length of the time-delay could be altered by adding more or less solder wire – but essentially proved to be an inherently unpredictable mechanism with which to fire a device; many devices of this kind exploded prematurely. The first device of this kind was used in Belfast in February 1970.

Mechanical TOIEDs used by the PIRA were designed to fire when the hands of a wristwatch or clock touched, or the knob on a wind-up timer wound down to its starting marker – because they had been modified to serve as the contact points that completed the electrical circuit that fired the device. These types of devices could be set to explode as much as 12 hours ahead of time.⁵⁸⁴ Electrical timers were used by the PIRA from 1976 onwards. These devices were commonly set to explode 10 to 12 hours ahead of time but incorporated a significantly longer time-delay on a few occasions. The device used in the famous 1984 attack at Brighton (which was intended to target Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher) was primed to explode three weeks ahead of time.

⁵⁸³ Smith, *3-2-1 Bomb Gone*, p.22.

⁵⁸⁴ Oppenheimer, *The IRA*, p.202.

Victim-operated IEDs (VOIEDs) incorporate a firing mechanism that is sensitive to and triggered by an action that is expected to be taken by the intended target – commonly referred to as a ‘booby trap’. A VOIED might explode, for example, when the intended target trips over the wire (tripwire), steps on the concealed sensor (pressure-mat), or opens the door that, unbeknownst to them, will complete an electrical circuit and fire a bomb. VOIEDs, like TOIEDs, provided the PIRA with scope to put distance between themselves and the explosion they intended to cause. However, unlike a TOIED (which has a pre-determined or at least vaguely predictable time of detonation) the PIRA could not predict exactly when or guarantee who would trigger the device. The VOIED that killed UDR Lance-Corporal William Gordon in February 1978 was designed to explode when the wheels of his car next began to move – the PIRA had no way of knowing for certain what day or time that would be or indeed who would be in the car at that moment; they did know that they wouldn’t be there to find out.⁵⁸⁵

Projectiles had a similar advantage to command and radio-controlled IEDs – they could be fired by the PIRA, from a distance. The RPG-7 rocket launchers the PIRA smuggled into Northern Ireland were essentially anti-tank weapons – they were sufficiently powerful to penetrate military vehicles with up to 320mm of armour plating.⁵⁸⁶ The PIRA also developed a range of mortars – a weapon described concisely by former ATO Steve Smith:

⁵⁸⁵ The explosives were fired when a 24-inch length of nylon monofilament that was wrapped around the air valve of the front driver’s side tyre and secured by the valve cap was pulled by the motion of the wheels. McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 1987-1988.

⁵⁸⁶ Which Lieutenant-Colonel Michael Dewar said was ‘anything in use by the Army and RUC in Ulster’. Dewar, *The British Army*, p.121; Oppenheimer, *The IRA*, p.229; Styles, *Bombs Have No Pity*, p.123.

A mortar is basically a smoothbore launch tube, which lobs a bomb in a high trajectory towards its target, usually over comparatively short ranges. Accuracy is generally imprecise, although it is good enough for hitting an area target.⁵⁸⁷

The range of mortars designed and produced by the PIRA evolved tremendously over the years – each new design that emerged was given sequential reference in the records maintained by the security forces.⁵⁸⁸ It is reported that the first five models posed a greater danger to the PIRA mortar operative than those they were firing at.⁵⁸⁹ Later iterations fired larger rounds, included multiple tubes, and became so large that they were often mounted onto the back of lorries. But innovations in PIRA mortar designs could be more complicated than merely increasing the payload. Steve Smith explains how the PIRA mortar Mark 2, which was first used on 5 December 1972, was designed with the intention of inflicting casualties on security force personnel that were inside the buildings that it was fired at:

The Mark 2 used the cartridge from a 12-bored shotgun as its means of propulsion. It was notable for having a built-in five-second delay between impact and detonation, so that the bomb could penetrate the roof of a target before exploding in the room below.⁵⁹⁰

The 1974 PIRA mortar Mark 6 was the first variation that could be fired a reasonable distance with accuracy.⁵⁹¹ The Mark 6 was first used on 28 September 1974 to fire rounds containing just over half a pound of HME each over a distance of around 300m. But later Mark 6 devices could achieve up to 1000m range and fired rounds that were filled instead with Semtex (after 1980 when they got Semtex).⁵⁹² The Mark 7 and Mark 8 that emerged

⁵⁸⁷ Smith, *3-2-1 Bomb Gone*, p.133.

⁵⁸⁸ Patrick, *Fetch Felix*, pp.58-60.

⁵⁸⁹ Smith, *3-2-1 Bomb Gone*, pp.135-136; Patrick, *Fetch Felix*, pp.51-61; Cochrane, 'The development', p.94.

⁵⁹⁰ Smith, *3-2-1 Bomb Gone*, pp.133-134.

⁵⁹¹ Patrick, *Fetch Felix*, p.59.

⁵⁹² Smith, *3-2-1 Bomb Gone*, pp.135-136.

during 1976 provided a significant increase in power (or 'payload') but apparently, compromised both range and stability to do so.⁵⁹³

The PIRA mortar Mark 8 was first debuted on 30 August 1976. The Monthly Bulletin of NIO Security Statistics for August 1976 explains that on this day the PIRA perpetrated a lorry-mounted mortar attack against the joint RUC/military base at Crossmaglen that was 'more sophisticated and professional than earlier attacks with a new bomb and base plate as well as a new method of execution.'⁵⁹⁴ The new method of execution referenced in the report was the time-delay system which allowed the mortar to be set to fire automatically, ahead of time, whereas previous iterations had all been manually fired by the PIRA.⁵⁹⁵ This new design feature was essentially a mechanism by which the PIRA could improve the likelihood of their being able to escape from the site of the attack without capture. This design feature would of course now mean that the mortar firing device would have to be abandoned in situ, whereas previous lorry-mounted or smaller devices had tended to be taken away with the PIRA after the attack. For this reason the PIRA also included a self-destruct mechanism into the device: the 11th explosive element of this mortar device was positioned above the diesel tank of the lorry and intended, therefore, to send the lorry up in flames to destroy any remaining forensic evidence or intelligence leads after the attack. On this occasion, however, the self-destruct element seems to have failed to disturb the diesel tank sufficiently to set fire to the truck.

⁵⁹³ Patrick, *Fetch Felix*, pp.51-60; Smith, *3-2-1 Bomb Gone*, p.137.

⁵⁹⁴ August 1976 in 'NIO Summary 1975-1976', TNA, CJ 4/1237.

⁵⁹⁵ Patrick, *Fetch Felix*, pp.51-60; 11 – 17 August 1973 in 'NIO Summary 1973', TNA, CJ 4/1024; NIO, Smith, *3-2-1 Bomb Gone*, p.137.

The Mark 9 (first used on October 1976) fired bigger rounds (up to 35lb of HME) but achieved a shorter range (100m).⁵⁹⁶ From the late 1970s onwards the PIRA's mortars proved both accurate and deadly. The Mark 10 generally functioned as it was intended to and produced serious devastation from the outset: all nine bombs that were fired functioned effectively on the first known use of this version, 19 March 1979, when the PIRA targeted Newtownhamilton RUC-Army barracks, killing Private Peter Leslie Woolmore and causing injuries to four of his colleagues, two RUC officers, and two civilians consequently.⁵⁹⁷

The various weapons that the PIRA had at their disposal at any point in their campaign could play a role in determining the targets and tactics they selected. This is because the characteristics of any given weapon – firepower, firing-range, rate of fire, or firing mechanism – could make it more or less capable of causing the death or destruction the PIRA intended in different scenarios. For this reason, it is necessary to also consider the characteristics of the targets the PIRA selected and environments in which they operated to understand the choices they made in this regard. The characteristics of PIRA weapons could also play a critical role in determining the outcome of events. Indeed, as we will see in part III, weapons malfunction is one of the primary reasons why there can be a discrepancy between the outcome that the PIRA had desired when they planned their operation, and the actual results of their actions.

²³⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁷ Cochrane, 'The development', p.94; McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 2081.

The Characteristics of PIRA Targets

Each of the targets that were selected by the PIRA had characteristics that influenced the way they decided to apply violence. The PIRA's choice of weapon or tactic might be influenced by factors including whether the target in question was likely to be alone or with others, wearing armour or armed, in- or outside a militarised vehicle or building. This section will outline some of the reasons why this was the case. The ways in which these decisions were further complicated by the characteristics of the environment in which the PIRA was operating will be discussed in the following section.

The PIRA took the nature of the target into account when planning the degree of firepower to apply. This was quite simply because a different level of force was required to penetrate the different types of anti-property or anti-personnel targets the PIRA selected. Smaller numbers of PIRA volunteers and lower-capacity weapons were involved when PIRA targets were expected to be alone, unarmed, unsuspecting, or have little opportunity to escape. Mrs Jennifer Ranking described the weapon that was used by one of the two PIRA gunman who entered her home in North Belfast via an unlocked door on 19 June 1976 and proceeded to shoot her husband, William Ranking, as the pair lay in bed, as 'like a wee toy gun'.⁵⁹⁸

It would be inappropriate to describe the imbalance of power as a 'military advantage' when the PIRA abducted unarmed civilians from their home or place of work at gunpoint,

⁵⁹⁸ It is thought the PIRA shot Ranking because they had mistaken him for a leading member of the UDA. 'Man is killed in bed', *Belfast Telegraph*, 19 June 1976, p.1; McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 1726.

then executed them with a handgun at close or point-blank range. Rather, in this scenario, the PIRA stacked the odds almost entirely in their favour.⁵⁹⁹ A detective inspector of the RUC told the inquest into the murder of fifteen-year-old Bernard Brendan Taggart (sometimes reported as Teggert) that their investigations had revealed that a number of men had forcibly taken the youth away ‘for questioning’ in a ‘London type taxi’ on the afternoon of 12 November 1973.⁶⁰⁰ Taggart was found by a UDR foot patrol at around 10 p.m. the same day, alone and bleeding in the Bellavue area of North Belfast along with a cardboard sign that read ‘Tout’ – meaning informer – in large lettering, and subsequently died of his injuries the following day. The post-mortem examination determined that he had been killed by a single small calibre shot discharged at close range.

More firepower was involved when the PIRA targeted individuals that were inside a vehicle or likely to be armed themselves – as part-time Ulster Defence Regiment (8 UDR) Sergeant, Jack (Jock) Eaglesham was when the PIRA ambushed him on 7 February 1978. It was approximately 9 a.m. on a Tuesday morning, and the UDR man was delivering letters at the time in the capacity of his other part-time role for the postal service. This day, the Sergeant’s post round had taken him onto a quiet country road – the Tullyodonnnell Road just outside the village of Rock (near Cookstown in Co. Tyrone) when he was ambushed by the PIRA. The post-man was himself armed when he came under fire from two PIRA gunmen who were armed with a Russian Kalashnikov and an American-made ArmaLite respectively

⁵⁹⁹ One critical element of risk to the PIRA’s objective can potentially remain in this scenario if other civilians were present when they attempted to abduct or execute an individual. This issue is explored in more detail in part III.

⁶⁰⁰ ‘Coroner’s Inquest relating to the death of Bernard Brendan Taggart’, 3 October 1974, PRONI, BELF/6/1/39/163A; McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 959.

and hiding in the field adjacent to his car.⁶⁰¹ A police chief is reported to have explained that the UDR man was nevertheless unable to defend himself against the superior firepower of his assassins: '[Eaglesham] was able to draw his pistol when he was attacked but had not time to get off even one shot'.⁶⁰²

The evidence suggests that the fatal shooting ambush attack on a police vehicle that paused at a T-junction at Ardboe (Co. Tyrone) on 2 June 1977 – and contained three RUC officers who were all killed – was perpetrated by three PIRA gunmen armed with ArmaLite AR-15 rifles (and possibly an AK-47 assault rifle).⁶⁰³

Armoured vehicles were much harder to penetrate and so it is common to find that a greater degree of firepower to target the security-force personnel that were inside them. The one-ton Humber armoured car (a vehicle that was commonly referred to by its nickname, the 'pig') was commonly used by the military during the early 1970s. In the first volume of his four-part series, *The British Army in Ulster* (1973), David Barzilay noted that some pigs had recently been fitted with heavier armour because 'IRA marksmen using armour-piercing rounds were able to penetrate the skin' of the vehicle.⁶⁰⁴ It is unclear whether the specific pig in which Corporal Michael Joseph Ryan was travelling on 17 March

⁶⁰¹ Barzilay, *Volume 3*, pp. 179-180; 'Dragnet for IRA Killers', *The Belfast Newsletter*, 8 February 1978, pp.1,3; February 1978 in 'NIO Summary 1977-1978', TNA, CJ 4/2297; 'I hope for peace but fear war', *The Belfast Newsletter*, 7 February 2018, <https://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/i-hope-for-peace-but-fear-war-1049690>, (20/02/2022); McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, ref: 1986.

⁶⁰² 'Dragnet for IRA Killers', *The Belfast Newsletter*, 8 February 1978, pp.1,3.

⁶⁰³ 'Post-mortem report and associated papers relating to the deaths of Samuel Derek Davison, Kenneth Norman Lynch and Hugh Henry Martin', 3 June 1977, PRONI, TYR/6/1/1/24/38A; McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 1037, 1938.

⁶⁰⁴ Barzilay, *Volume 1*, p.87.

1974 had been reinforced or not. Either way, the wire mesh window of the vehicle was penetrated by an armour-piercing round that was fired from a Garand rifle by the PIRA as the vehicle approached the junction of Foyle Road and Hamilton Street in the Brandywell area of Derry – and Corporal Ryan was killed as a result.⁶⁰⁵

Many of the fatalities that resulted from PIRA ambush attacks on moving militarised vehicles involved explosives. The command-wire IED used to attack a Saracen armoured truck carrying members of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders on 10 September 1972 was referred to by journalists as a ‘monster landmine’. It is estimated to have contained 400-500lb of explosives and was, at that point, the biggest device of its type encountered during the Troubles.⁶⁰⁶ The weapon was certainly powerful enough to achieve the PIRA’s intended outcome: the explosion was said to have flung the large, armoured vehicle ‘like a toy’ over 20ft, claiming the lives of three soldiers in the process.⁶⁰⁷

The PIRA used varying degrees of firepower when attacking anti-property targets, depending on what they wanted to achieve and how easily it was for them to access the site. When it comes to commercial properties, the PIRA needed to apply less force to cause damage to a building from within than from without. The bombs which the PIRA planted inside buildings were much smaller than those that were planted outside them by comparison. For example, the suitcase bomb that the PIRA threw into the Springfield Road

⁶⁰⁵ 16-29 March 1974 in ‘NIO Summary 1974-1975’, TNA, CJ 4/1787; McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 1037.

⁶⁰⁶ Smith, *3-2-1 Bomb Gone*, p.121.

⁶⁰⁷ Barzilay, *Volume 1*, pp.54-55; McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 586,587,583.

RUC station, causing 'severe damage' to the property and killing an RUC sergeant, on 25 May 1971 was estimated to contain 30lb of homemade explosives (HME).⁶⁰⁸ The time-operated devices that were left in public houses in Woolwich and Guildford to target off-duty soldiers in November 1974 contained approximately 6lb of commercial explosives (gelignite).⁶⁰⁹ The bombs used to target RUC stations from external positions were much larger, by comparison. The IED that was positioned against the wall of the Essex International Factory in Derry to target the adjacent security force base on 17 April 1972 contained approximately 500lb of HME, and the car bomb intended to target Dungannon RUC station from the adjacent alley way on 14 February 1974 contained 750lb of HME.⁶¹⁰

A much smaller degree of firepower was used to target commercial properties on other occasions, however, because to some extent the PIRA only needed to cause disruption, create a visual spectacle, or instil fear. This was firstly because the intensity of public reaction was not always proportionate to the size of the weapon used, number of PIRA involved, or the damage that resulted for, as former bomb-disposal expert Peter Gurney explains:

..... it took only a very small device left in a railway carriage or a London Underground train to ensure maximum publicity, the dislocation of public services, and the disruption of the economic life of the capital.⁶¹¹

⁶⁰⁸ 25 May 1971, 'HG39 Diary, May 71', TNA, WO305/4246.

⁶⁰⁹ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 1198;1199;1200;1201;1202.

⁶¹⁰ 16 February - 1 March 1974 in 'NIO Summary 1974-1975', TNA, CJ 4/1787; TNA WO 305/4199, 'Northern Ireland Command', 17 April 1972.

⁶¹¹ Gurney, *Braver Men*, pp.147-148.

The Characteristics of Different Environments

PIRA operations were tailored to suit different environments because different types of spaces could provide the PIRA with different military advantages or disadvantages depending on the topography and its population.

There were copious amounts of trees, bushes, and fields of crops that could provide a natural source of cover to conceal PIRA weapons and operatives when they waged guerrilla warfare in the countryside. The PIRA had a greater degree of freedom to transport, prepare or hide their weapons in the countryside without drawing attention to themselves in the process because naturally, there was a lower footfall (i.e., fewer people to see them) and less light pollution (i.e., more scope to hide under the cover of darkness) in this type of environment. The very fact that rural environments are less populated meant that the PIRA also had a greater degree of freedom to apply force without posing risk to civilians. In this sense, the rural environment gave the PIRA the opportunity to make use weapons that might otherwise be too cumbersome or powerful to use in urban spaces.

Rural spaces could provide the PIRA with conditions that were ripe for perpetrating long-range attacks – a near absence of buildings and a hilly topography in which they could seek an elevated vantage point from which to survey the movements of their intended targets. The 250lb command-wire IED (CWIED) which killed two members of the Anti-Tank Platoon as they travelled down a country road at Tullyogallaghan (near Newtownhamilton, Co. Armagh) on 7 April 1973, was fired by PIRA volunteers who gazed down at them from their

panoramic purchase, 550-600m away.⁶¹² The PIRA volunteers who fired the 200lb CWIED that was concealed in a culvert under the Cookstown to Omagh Road at Dunamore as a two-vehicle convoy of UDR Land Rovers passed it on 3 March 1973, would have had an equally clear view of their target from the firing point used for that attack, which was said to have been overlooking the road and 175 yards away from where the explosion eventually occurred.⁶¹³

To some extent, it was easier for the PIRA to attract the attention of the security forces when they wanted to lure them towards an ambush or booby-trap in the countryside. This is because the items they discarded or scenes they set there tended to look as suspiciously out-of-place as the PIRA had intended. A case in point occurred on 18 February 1974 when Staff Sergeant Alan Brammah was killed by a victim-operated device (VOIED) in a rural space outside Moybane (Co. Armagh). The weapon was designed to be initiated by a pressure plate that was buried in a field in a spot where the topsoil had been left disturbed to extent that it looked suspicious enough to draw the attention of the bomb-disposal unit whose expert was sadly, to fall victim to it.⁶¹⁴

⁶¹² Head Quarters 3 Infantry Brigade Intelligence Summary 14/73, For the Period 2-9 April 1973, TNA, WO305/4212; 6 – 12 April 1973 in 'NIO Summary 1973', TNA, CJ 4/1024; Morton, *Emergency Tour*, p.10-11; *Fortnight*, No. 60 (Apr. 13, 1973), pp. 14-15; McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 816-817; 'Provos Admit Mine Murder', *The Belfast NewsLetter*, 9 April 1973, p.1.

⁶¹³ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 1024; 2 – 15 March 1974 in 'NIO Summary 1974-1975', TNA, CJ 4/1787.

⁶¹⁴ 16 February - 1 March 1974 in 'NIO Summary 1974-1975', TNA, CJ 4/1787; McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 1014.

The fact there was a lower footfall in these rural spaces also meant that it was less likely that those outside the intended target would unwittingly trigger the victim-operated devices that the PIRA planted there. It might even be possible to say that the PIRA could fabricate scenes that looked so suspiciously out of place in rural areas that civilians would know to keep their distance. However, as we will see in part III, using victim-operated devices in the rural sphere was not always a casualty-free tactic, and never a risk-free choice.

The very same characteristics of the countryside that the PIRA used to their advantage in some scenarios, could present them with equal and opposite disadvantages in other scenarios. The weapons the PIRA concealed in rural spaces to use with ambush tactics would stand out unless they were very well disguised – failure to conceal meant failure to surprise and, therefore, the discovery and dismantling of PIRA weapons before they were used.⁶¹⁵ PIRA weapons hides could be found and confiscated for the very same reason. On 8 February 1976, the section commander of a squadron from The Queen's Dragoon Guards discovered a black plastic bag containing rounds for an M1 Carbine concealed in a hole by a tree which he decided to investigate on a hunch because it 'stood out' from the row of trees which bordered a field in Dungannon because all of its branches had been removed.⁶¹⁶

The PIRA could also find that it was harder to escape the scene of a crime unnoticed in the countryside because, with fewer people around, it was harder for them to blend into the

⁶¹⁵ Smith, *3-2-1 Bomb Gone*, p.122.

⁶¹⁶ Barzilay, *Volume 3*, pp.37-38.

background. The 1975 Forkhill ambush (previously discussed part I) is a good example of how a rural terrain can work both for and against the PIRA in different ways.⁶¹⁷ The evidence suggests that the PIRA volunteer that triggered the CWIED device had not been lying in wait for the prospective arrival of a target – the weapon had been concealed at an earlier stage and was primed and ready to fire, but the PIRA-bomber had been at home when the troops arrived by helicopter to investigate a suspicious object in the area. On the one hand, the fact that the bomb-disposal unit had been investigating the site for approximately 40 minutes before the explosion occurred demonstrates that the PIRA had concealed the device well on this occasion for, neither the 70lb of HME that was dug into the bank, nor the command wire which connected it to the firing point 400 yards away were uncovered during this time. On the other hand, the fact that the PIRA volunteer who fired the bomb was spotted making a desperate scramble up the hill to the firing point by Corporal Anthony Warriner through the telescopic sight attached to his rifle, and was subsequently identified by the very same soldier at a pop-up vehicle-checkpoint that had been set up in the immediate aftermath of the blast to give them control over the area demonstrates that the volunteer had been infinitely less successful at hiding himself from view.⁶¹⁸

The primary advantage the PIRA had in the urban sphere, by contrast, was the vast variety of opportunities available to seek cover more creatively, by hiding in plain sight. There was less pressure for the PIRA to become experts in the art of camouflage when it came hiding

⁶¹⁷ Harnden, *Bandit Country*, pp.78-79; David Barzilay, *Volume 2*, pp.236-239; Smith, *3-2-1 Bomb Gone*, p.121; 17-30 July 1975 in 'NIO Summary 1974-1975', TNA, CJ 4/1787; McKittrick et al., *Lost Lives*, references: 1411,1412,1413,1414.

⁶¹⁸ R v Thompson, *Northern Ireland Law Reports* (1977), NI 74.

weapons in urban spaces. It has already been noted that PIRA could have varying degrees of success with transporting weapons to and from their urban assaults by concealing weapons inside ordinary everyday objects including prams. The same tactic was also used by the PIRA to plant bombs. Small incendiaries were disguised as cigarette packets or cassette tapes that were small enough to be left in amongst the products in the shops the PIRA wanted to target.⁶¹⁹ Other time-operated IEDs were disguised as if they were forgotten shopping bags left in cafes or in public restrooms. There was also scope to hide much larger weapons in plain sight in an urban environment. Vehicles, for example, were commonly used as a container for explosives that the PIRA would park outside of the building they intended to target.⁶²⁰

Gunmen and bomb-planters could also have an easier time escaping the scene of a crime than the Forkhill bomber did, if they quickly blended in with the civilian population. A PIRA gunman involved in the fatal drive-by shooting attack on Corporal Richard Millar which occurred outside of the Royal Victoria Hospital in West Belfast on 25 August 1973 appears to have been attempting to use precisely this strategy: a witness to the attack described the perpetrator as having worn normal clothes, driven a normal car and acted 'almost casual'.⁶²¹

Urban guerrilla warfare was not without its challenges. The PIRA had limited scope to bury high volumes of explosives or lengths of command wire in built-up urban spaces. The PIRA's ability to survey their target from ground level was impaired when they operated in built-up

⁶¹⁹ Styles, *Bombs Have No Pity*, p.109.

⁶²⁰ Macdonald, *Stopping the Clock*, p.138.

⁶²¹ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 939.

residential and commercial spaces. The PIRA could find it challenging to evade capture and arrest in urban environments in some respects simply because buildings stood in the way of their view of the soldiers or police who were actively pursuing them. However, the urban theatre could provide the PIRA with ample opportunity for gaining a better vantage point, taking cover, or seeking military advantage over their opponents in other ways.

High rise buildings could provide the PIRA with a birds-eye view of the streets below, while streetlamps improved the PIRA's ability to identify their targets at night. The (anonymised) statements that were taken from the soldiers of an 8-man foot patrol who were involved in the fatal shooting of 13-year-old Fianna volunteer (youth branch of the PIRA) Sean O-Riordan in West Belfast on 23 March 1972 – which were taken by the Royal Military Police the day after the incident – highlight how streetlamps could work for and against those engaging in military and paramilitary activity in urban areas.⁶²² For context, it is worth noting that an RUC report of the investigations into this incident concluded in April 1974 that Sean had been 'one of three petrol bombers who attacked the Army in Cawnpore Street'.⁶²³ The family and legal representatives of deceased, are said to have maintained during the inquest that the youth had not personally thrown a device.⁶²⁴ But, the coroner is said to have concluded that it was a 'fairly safe conclusion' that petrol bombs were thrown at the soldiers who proceeded to return fire; but that there was no concrete evidence to

⁶²² *Belfast Graves*, p.90; McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference:318; 'Coroner's Inquest relating to the death of Sean O'Riordan', 18 June 1974, PRONI, BELF/6/1/1/39/101A. Thereafter: PRONI, BELF/6/1/1/39/101A.

⁶²³ Royal Ulster Constabulary, 'Report of Enquiries into Death of Sean O'Riordan', 17-04-1974, PRONI, BELF/6/1/1/39/101A.

⁶²⁴ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference:318.

allow them to conclude that Sean was one of the youths in the group who had thrown the weapon.⁶²⁵

The soldiers' statements agree a version of events whereby: the soldiers are attacked by youths with petrol bombs (who were on Cawnpore Street) as they reached the junction of Cupar Street and Cawnpore Street, they opened fire in response before backing away from the junction to take cover at different positions on Cupar Street. The account taken from Solider 'B' provides evidence to suggest that the petrol bombers may have gained some advantage from the relative darkness of the position from which they were operating, for they note that visibility was 'not good as most of the street lights were out on Campore St'.⁶²⁶ All of the soldier's accounts then agree that they began to move cautiously back towards Cawnpore Street to establish the current state of the threat, at which point low velocity bullets were fired at them from the direction of to the Springfield Road (all soldiers hear gunfire from this direction, and soldier C specifically reports seeing the muzzle flash from the weapon in Lanark Street which, according to the map included in the file, is one street further back from the soldiers position in the direction of the Springfield Road). Soldier A, who is noted to be in command of the 8-man patrol, reports that it is at this point that they realised that their position was highly compromised by the streetlamps – something that all the soldiers noted the commander tries desperately, but ultimately unsuccessfully to rectify:

The patrol were being lit up by the light from a street lamp directly in front of us and were clearly viable. I shouted to the patrol for someone to throw a brick and knock

⁶²⁵ Ibid.

⁶²⁶ 'Statement of Soldier B - Royal Military Police Statement Form: Case Ref No 03606/2', 24 March 1972, PRONI, BELF/6/1/1/39/101A.

the light out. There was no response to this and I then hear more firing from the direction of Springfield Rd. I could not establish whether these shots were fired at us. I fired one shot at the street lamp in an attempt to put it out, but missed. Soldier B who was to my rear at this point asked permission to try himself. I gave this and Soldier B fired one shot which made a distinct hole in the glass of the street lamp but it did not go out.⁶²⁷

It isn't clear whether the petrol bombers consciously selected Cawnpore Street because of the advantage that the damaged streetlamps gave them, or whether there is any chance that the streetlamps had been interfered with for this very purpose. There is evidence, however, that the PIRA purposefully manipulated streetlamps to their advantage on other occasions. On 15 July 1972 RUC Constable Robert Laverty was shot and killed when he was a passenger in a police vehicle that was driving the Antrim Road in North Belfast by two PIRA gunmen who opened fire on the vehicle from the direction of Willowbank Gardens. On this occasion it was reported that the timing mechanism in the streetlamps on the Antrim Road had been tampered with so that the area was in darkness at the time of the attack.⁶²⁸ And there is evidence that the PIRA made use of other sources of light during night-time attacks. The sniper who fired on an army foot patrol in the Fountain Street area of Strabane (Co. Tyrone) from inside a derelict property on the evening of 15 November 1974 was said to have waited until the soldiers were fully visible in the light from the headlights of a passing car before opening fire.⁶²⁹

Finally, it is evident that the border with the Republic offered advantages to the PIRA. This is not to say that the PIRA were able to act with impunity when in the Republic of Ireland:

⁶²⁷ 'Statement of Soldier A - Royal Military Police Statement Form: Case Ref No 03606/2', 24 March 1972, PRONI, BELF/6/1/1/39/101A.

⁶²⁸ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 475.

⁶²⁹ *Ibid.*, reference: 1239.

law and order and security matters south of the border, including PIRA activities, were policed and investigated by the Garda Síochána, Irish Army, and the Secret Intelligence Service. However, there is some agreement in the literature that the PIRA was able to operate with greater ease from the Republic than they could in Northern Ireland during the 1970s,⁶³⁰ and primary source evidence appears to corroborate the claim. For example, a RUC-Garda Co-ordinating committee report on the situation in South Armagh drawn up in February 1976 specifically highlighted their strategic use of the border with the republic of Ireland:

Experience backed up by intelligence reports reveals that guerrilla tactics include ... Painstaking reconnaissance of and intelligence on specific targets... Careful selection of personnel for the actual operation... Excellent timing using hit-and-run methods... Strategic withdrawal to areas well away from the Border, immediate resumption of normal activities and blending with the local population.⁶³¹

Former ATO Lieutenant-Colonel Derrick Patrick explained that before legal changes were brought in to control the manufacturing, purchase, and use of commercial explosives in Northern Ireland and the Republic, the PIRA was able to source key elements for IED production from south of the border:

...it had been proved emphatically that the principal source of supply of detonators to the IRA was from the Republic all detonators produced for use in the South were crimp-marked. All explosives manufactured by Irish Industrial Explosives Ltd are serial-numbered and, in addition, there are covert methods of marking.⁶³²

⁶³⁰ Adams, Morgan and Bambridge, *Ambush*, p.71.

⁶³¹ 'RUC-Garda Co-coordinating Committee Report on South Armagh', February 1976, pp.7-8, TNA, CJ 4/2853.

⁶³² Patrick, *Fetch Felix*, p.167.

Tailoring PIRA Tactics to Adapt to the Material Conditions

A close examination of PIRA operations reveals that they adopted a variety of different mechanisms to navigate the various obstacles that were posed by the material conditions to attain the three primary objectives (which were outlined above) when they designed their operations.

When the PIRA targeted people – civilians or security-force personnel – they endeavoured to preserve their own interests by applying sufficient force to overwhelm their target. They did so to lower the chances that would face return fire or be captured and arrested. We have already seen how the PIRA selected their weapons, ammunition or explosives in order to do so. There were several other ways that the PIRA worked to tip the balance of power, in this regard.

The PIRA would observe security force patrols in order to identify when and where soldiers or police personnel would be most vulnerable to attack. Consequently, security-force personnel were especially prone to be targeted by the PIRA when they were alone or in small groups, in a stationary position, or outside their body armour, armoured vehicles or buildings. For instance, PIRA snipers would pick off the last soldier in a foot patrol – the ‘tail-end Charlie’ – or those who were tasked to a stationary guiding duty – the ‘sitting duck’.⁶³³ The PIRA endeavoured to increase the likelihood that they would succeed to overwhelm a target by concealing themselves and or their weapons in surprising places. Corporal John

⁶³³ The term ‘sitting duck’ is used to refer to individuals in stationary positions such as guard-duty, in military memoirs including: Birchall, *The Longest Walk*, p.99; For examples of cases see: McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 720, 777, 793, 892, 1023.

Aikmen was shot and killed as he walked across the town square at Newtownhamilton (Co. Armagh) on 6 November 1973 by gunmen who were hiding behind the boarded-up window of a pub that had been damaged by a bomb explosion the previous week.⁶³⁴ The gunmen were said to have fired up to eight rounds from a pistol, and succeeded in penetrating the corporal's flak jacket.⁶³⁵

The PIRA also used various methods of deception to lure security-force personnel unwittingly towards the location of an explosive device or ambush attack. For instance, the PIRA or their supporters would report, under false pretences, that they had heard gunfire, spotted a potential bombing device, or witnessed suspicious behaviour, to give the impression that they required some form of assistance from the emergency services – tactics of this sort are often referred to in military records and memoirs as a 'come-on'.⁶³⁶ Corporal Donald Traynor of the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers (3rd Battalion) was killed by a PIRA VOIED on 30 March 1976, after responding to what turns out to have been a hoax call designed to lure a soldier or policeman to their death.⁶³⁷ It is said that a woman called the RUC confidential telephone service to report that her husband was involved in a loyalist assassination plot – for which weapons were being stored in the loft of Ballygargan Orange Hall, near Portadown. He was killed instantly upon opening the loft hatch.

⁶³⁴ 3 – 9 November 1973 in 'NIO Summary 1973', TNA, CJ 4/1024; McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 955.

⁶³⁵ 6 November 1973, references: 18, 19, 222, 'HQ3 Diary, Nov 73', TNA, WO 305/4219.

⁶³⁶ Smith, *3-2-1 Bomb Gone*, p.64.

⁶³⁷ 24 March – 6 April 1976 in 'NIO Summary 1975-1976', TNA, CJ 4/1787; March 1976 in 'NIO Summary 1975-1976', TNA, CJ 4/1237; McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 1651.

Other times the PIRA endeavoured to increase the chances that they would inflict maximum casualties among those they targeted by increasing the number of IEDs they planted in a single attack, or by setting them to fire at different times to create multiple stages to the assault. The logic of the latter tactic was that the PIRA might inflict further casualties when the second or third device exploded because colleagues of those who were killed or injured in the first blast had, by that time, arrived to provide medical, rescue, or clear-up services. Sometimes these multi-stage attacks exclusively involved command-wire or radio-controlled devices which the PIRA would fire, manually, at separate intervals. Other times the secondary devices were victim-operated or included a time-delay, in which case the overall risk-profile of the incident is more complicated (something that is discussed in detail in part III). The evidence suggests that a multi-stage attack the PIRA assembled for use just outside the village of Ballsmill (Co. Armagh) on 19 April 1973 was one such case; although it seems that not everything went according to plan on the day.⁶³⁸

On this occasion the PIRA sought to attract the attention of the security forces by parking a lorry, acquired via hijacking the previous day, right across a road. The first stage of the attack the PIRA had planned was to fire a command-wire IED that they had concealed at the side of the road near to the lorry as soon as soldiers were within range of it.⁶³⁹ The second stage of the plan, it seems, had been to inflict further casualties on the soldiers who were involved in the subsequent clear-up operation with a second device. The evidence also

⁶³⁸ 19 April 1973, references: 8, 11, 14, 19, 'HQ3 Diary, April 73', TNA, WO 305/4212; 'Annex D - RUC Division H' to HQ 3 Infantry Brigade, 'Border Report April 1973', 11 May 1973, TNA, WO305/4213.

⁶³⁹ This device consisted of two milk churns that were filled with 100-200lb of Homemade explosives (which on this occasion was a mix of Ammonium Nitrate plus Fuel Oil or 'ANFO') that was boosted with commercial explosives.

suggests that the plan had been to lure the follow-up response team towards device 2, and for the PIRA to be well away from the scene by the time it exploded.

Device 2 was assembled close to the firing point of device 1 (i.e. the place where the PIRA would have been positioned when they detonated the first bomb) which was around 1000 yards away from the van.⁶⁴⁰ The command wire that connected the explosives in device 1 to this firing point was (intentionally) poorly concealed so as to encourage the response team to walk towards device 2. Device 2 was designed to be armed by a clock but fired by radio-control – which essentially means it was the kind of bomb that explodes after a time-delay, and that the countdown – rather than the explosion – is triggered when the PIRA pushes a button. This mechanism meant that the PIRA had intended for there to be a set period of time between the two explosions, during which they could make their escape from the scene, and because of which they might inflict further casualties on soldiers (i.e., if they had anticipated the response team's agenda and timeline correctly).

On the day, however, the PIRA seem to have decided to fire only device 2 – the one with the time delay. This device was said to have partially detonated, causing an explosion which 'narrowly missed an officer' but ultimately failed to cause any casualties.⁶⁴¹ It seems logical to conclude that the reason they chose not to fire device 1 – the command wire device – even though soldiers had eventually come within fatal proximity of it, was that it became apparent to them the explosion was i) unlikely to kill all the soldiers that were present at the

⁶⁴⁰ This device consisted of 8 (empty) gas cylinders that had been filled with 20-30 lbs HME each, plus a commercial booster, and then joined together by cordtex.

⁶⁴¹ Two of the eight cylinders exploded.

scene, ii) likely to give away their position to those who survived, iii) likely to draw further soldiers into the area within in a short space of time and, iv) for all these reasons, unlikely to be an attack that they could escape from afterwards. The attack – as it was planned and as it was adapted – provides evidence to suggest that the PIRA were adapting the armed struggle to suit the conditions and prioritised their own interests above the other two primary objectives.

Most controversially, the PIRA sought to gain military advantage over their security-force targets by targeting them when they were off-duty.⁶⁴² The practice certainly tipped the balance of power in the PIRA's favour for off-duty police officers or soldiers were less likely to be armed, wearing armour, or expecting to be attacked. These attacks could involve just as much forward preparation, and patience to execute, nevertheless. It is believed that the PIRA member or members responsible for shooting UDR Private Sydney Watts as he arrived home from visiting a friend had been hiding in position for the best part of an hour before they killed him, and that they must have been monitoring his habits and routines for some time, in order to know that he did so around the same time every week.⁶⁴³ On other occasions the PIRA took additional measures to ensure their target was surprised. The gunmen who shot UDR Private Samuel Porter as he reversed his car into the driveway of his property in Ballinahone (near Maghera, Derry) on 22 November 1972, for example, poisoned the UDR Private's pet Alsatian earlier in the day so that it would not be able to alert its owner to the mortal danger he was facing by barking.⁶⁴⁴

⁶⁴² For example, McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference:191, 1970.

⁶⁴³ *Ibid.*, reference: 901.

⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, reference: 679; *Fortnight*, No. 51 (Nov. 30, 1972), p.14.

When it was not possible to generate a scenario whereby the PIRA was likely to overwhelm the target, the PIRA sought to preserve their own interests by limiting the amount of time they were exposed (to their enemy) or by putting some degree of physical distance between themselves and said target. In some scenarios the PIRA essentially used a 'hit-and-run' tactic. These were close-range ambush attacks that are followed by the immediate and fast exit of the perpetrator. The PIRA's operations which share these common characteristics varied in scale and scope.

At one extreme, a single volunteer would fire a single gunshot (or short burst of automatic fire) at a small group of soldiers from close range, before proceeding to make their escape on foot. These lone PIRA gunmen are described in some accounts as using a 'shoot-and-scoot' tactic. That certainly seems a fair account of the circumstances in which Private Paul Carter was shot on 14 September 1971.⁶⁴⁵ Private Carter was standing outside the Royal Victoria Hospital in West Belfast at the time to provide cover for other soldiers tasked with delivering medical supplies to the hospital. The small burst of gunfire that wounded the soldier was thought to have come from the direction of Dunville Park, close to the junction of Springfield Road. The gunman escaped on foot immediately afterwards by retreating into the maze of streets around the Lower Falls.

The PIRA gunman who shot and killed RUCR constable William Baggley while he was on duty in a two-man police foot patrol walking down the Dungiven Road in Derry on 29 January

⁶⁴⁵ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 125; Deutsch and Magowan, *Volume 1*, p.127.

1974 was more brazen in his assault. The surviving police officer remembers someone running at them firing 5 shots from a revolver; when he returned fire the gunman started running towards them again, firing a further two shots before running away from the scene of the crime.⁶⁴⁶

Hit-and-run style tactics could be equally close in range but longer in duration if the PIRA felt they could afford to risk a longer period of exposure (to prospective return fire) because they themselves were in possession of sufficient firepower as to be able to match or exceed that in the possession of their target. If they succeeded in overwhelming the target, this might eliminate the need to 'run' to some extent – but never entirely, for it was inevitable that the police or soldiers would respond to the incident and be in the vicinity before long.

The PIRA could amplify the scale or scope of the tactic if the 'escape' element of the plan involved motor-vehicles. The PIRA used motorbikes, cars and vans to perpetrate drive-by shooting attacks.⁶⁴⁷ And sometimes they perpetrated high-speed bombing attacks by making their escape in a similar fashion. This tactic was seen on 25 May 1971 when the PIRA hurled a bomb contained in a suitcase into Springfield Road RUC station in West Belfast; an attack which claimed the life of Sergeant Michael G. Willets (Parachute Regiment) as he shielded children from the force of the blast, and caused injuries to a further two soldiers, seven police officers, and 18 civilians.⁶⁴⁸

⁶⁴⁶ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 1004; Deutsch and Magowan, *Volume 3*, p.9; 19 January – 1 February 1974 in 'NIO Summary 1974-1975', TNA, CJ 4/1787.

⁶⁴⁷ See, for example, McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 739, 2106, 939, 948, 1985.

⁶⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, reference: 74.

The PIRA could also maintain their interests by increasing the distance that they put between themselves and their opponents. Weapons that could be fired over a long range or could be fired remotely from a distance, allowed the PIRA to adopt tactics that decreased the likelihood of their being harmed by their own explosive devices or return fire, and allowed them to get a head start when making their escape from the scene. The latter of which could be especially important to the PIRA if they were unsuccessful in overwhelming the foot and vehicle patrols they targeted entirely. For example, PIRA snipers fired from concealed hiding spots that ranged anything from 15 to several hundred meters away from their target. The sniper responsible for the assassination of Private Crozier at the Flax Street Mill observation post in North Belfast on 23 August 1971 was said to have fired from a position that was approximately 250 yards away.⁶⁴⁹

A skilled marksman may have the capacity to target small party of soldiers or police officers in quick succession without succumbing to return fire in the process; most PIRA snipers would not. In any case, it was quickly recognised that firing multiple rounds from a stationary position was the easiest way for a PIRA sniper to reveal their position and consequently, raise the risk that they will be injured, killed or captured, and prospectively lose the PIRA a valuable weapon in the process. For this reason, the ‘one-shot sniper’ tactic was primarily used from August 1971 onwards; a tactic which former Chief of Staff Seán Mac Stiofáin claims responsibility for introducing in his memoir:

⁶⁴⁹ Styles, *Bombs Have No Pity*, p.110.

The principle was to fire only one shot, after which, hit or miss – and this was drummed into them until they practically screamed – the team went immediately to ground. It was impossible to locate their position provided they fired only one round.⁶⁵⁰

The fact that there were 13 fatal sniper attacks launched by the PIRA against the on-duty soldiers that occurred between August and December 1971 (all of which occurred in Belfast and Derry)⁶⁵¹ and just two military casualties of PIRA snipers' attacks occurred prior to this,⁶⁵² indicates that Mac Stiofáin was not providing an over-inflated account of the danger this tactic could pose. The fact that soldiers were able to quickly identify and return fire at PIRA sniper's position on other occasions, however, undermines his claim that that it was 'impossible' to locate their position.⁶⁵³

PIRA bombers reaped the 'personal safety' benefits of explosive devices that could be fired remotely. Command wire and radio-controlled IEDs (CWIED and RCIED, respectively) attacks often targeted multiple vehicle convoys. If successful they might harm or kill the passengers of one or more vehicles. However, the PIRA could find themselves in danger of being shot or arrested when the colleagues of those they ambushed were alerted and tasked to respond to the scene. For this reason, gaining a head start on escaping from the scene was highly preferable to PIRA interests.

⁶⁵⁰ Mac Stiofáin, *Memoirs*, pp.301-302.

⁶⁵¹ See McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references:100, 112, 113, 117, 140, 145, 147, 166, 178,182, 186,220, 228.

⁶⁵² *Ibid.*, references: 53, 78.

⁶⁵³ *Ibid.*, references: 1037, 1239.

In other scenarios, PIRA volunteers ensured their own safety by using weapons which allowed them to be totally absent from the scene at the moment of impact. The weapons which allowed the PIRA to use such a tactic were their time-operated or victim-operated IEDs. Depending on the length of the delay, and power of the device, the PIRA could achieve different scales of damage, destruction or death with this tactic. The consistent feature or advantage seen in all instances is that the concealment, and unexpected detonation of the weapon could increase the likelihood that they would achieve their intended outcome because the tactic homed in on the element of surprise.

The PIRA's TOIED incendiary devices (which might be of the tintack, clothes peg and solder wire; mechanical and electric; or chemical designed outlined above) were sometimes set to provide several hours delay. These weapons were often used to generate commercial damage. The device could be planted in commercial properties during opening hours and set to explode at night when the premises was closed and vacant of civilians. These devices could cause small or extensive damage. In fact, it is sometimes reported that it was the water-sprinkler system that caused a greater degree of damage to commercial properties (although this is of course a direct bi-product of what the PIRA was doing). Still, fire even without much damage, was an effective source of spectacle.

Gemma Clark's work on the Irish Civil War (1922-23) explains that fire is a potent and highly symbolic weapon and, given that it is catching, a relatively inexpensive way to achieve an

impact.⁶⁵⁴ This point is pertinent to explaining why the PIRA used small incendiary devices to target shops and restaurants on a regular basis, and one of the reasons why buses were hijacked and set on fire in city centres. When multiple incendiary devices were planted in commercial targets and set to fire after the premises was closed there was scope for the fire to catch and spread into something truly ferocious and spectacular before the alarm was raised and fire fighters began to tackle it.

TOIEDs with very long-time delays also provided the PIRA with the means to target those otherwise hard to gain access to, such as high-profile celebrity or political figures that were unlikely to be alone, unguarded or in spaces which the PIRA could easily gain access to. Devices with a few hours or days of time-delay also allowed the PIRA to perpetrate violence without fear of return fire. And they were used in situations where the overwhelming prospect of return fire would otherwise serve as a deterrent.

Victim-operated IEDs (VOIEDs) were also employed by the PIRA to enable them to perpetrate violence in a manner that allowed them to be away from the scene. The PIRA took on the risk of exposure during the preparation stages of these attacks when they were planting the devices in the personal space of the intended target – for instance, in the personal vehicles or properties of security-force personnel or so-called collaborators. For the PIRA could be spotted by witnesses or the intended target and potentially even face

⁶⁵⁴ Gemma Clark, *Everyday Violence in the Irish Civil War* (Cambridge, 2014), p.54.

return fire. Less risk was onboarded by the PIRA in this regard, when they planted VOIEDs in neutral territory with the intention of luring the intended target to the device.

Being absent from the scene protected them from the prospect of return fire, arrest, or capture. But the PIRA could still be 'exposed' to risk, so to say, when making, transporting, concealing, or priming the weapon. The size and scale of the weapon and task of concealing it could determine how much.

The PIRA also sought to apply violence in a manner that preserved their own interests when they took steps to avoid leaving behind forensic evidence which could bring about convictions at a later stage.⁶⁵⁵ One way they did so was to integrate self-destruct mechanisms into their explosive devices.

There is also evidence to suggest that they planned their operations to occur in a manner which – to varying degrees – was intended to reduce, minimise, or avoid risk being posed to civilian safety. The PIRA issued advance warning of specific bombs that had been planted, for instance, to allow time for the security forces to clear civilians from the scene of the planned explosion. This was especially common when the PIRA targeted shops and restaurants or other commercial properties during the working day. For example, on 17 April 1972, the PIRA planted a bomb in the Essex International Factory in Derry.⁶⁵⁶ Advance notice of the bomb issued by the PIRA gave forewarning of the bomb to the security forces

⁶⁵⁵ Geraghty, *The Irish War*, pp.81-90.

⁶⁵⁶ TNA WO 305/4199, 'Northern Ireland Command', 17 April 1972.

which allowed time for the 200 factory employees and residents to be evacuated from the area, and the device was dismantled.

Sometimes live verbal or other warnings were issued to civilians who were in the general vicinity of an imminent attack. In nationalist areas it is believed that warnings were spread by word of mouth, quietly, in advance of urban shooting ambush attacks on soldiers. A sergeant told the inquest into the killing of George Hamilton in a PIRA sniper attack on a six-man foot patrol on the Glenalina Road, in the Ballymurphy area of West Belfast on 17 October 1971 that, shortly before incident the patrol had noticed local people were leaving the vicinity and that this was usually the sign of an impending attack.⁶⁵⁷ Another soldier similarly recalled that moments before the shooting ambush in the New Lodge area of North Belfast on 30 July 1974 that resulted in the death of Sergeant Bernard Fearn that all of a sudden, everyone in the busy street ‘just vanished from sight’.⁶⁵⁸

An example of a time the PIRA gave a last-minute, frantic, and non-verbal warning of sorts to a civilian that they were potentially placing in imminent danger occurred on the afternoon of 10 August 1971 in Derry.⁶⁵⁹ Four men in a car were said to have driven past Bligh’s Lane RUC-Military post whilst flashing the lights and honking the horn of their car moments before a PIRA sniper fired at the post with a .303 rifle, killing Bombardier Paul Challenor of the 3rd Royal Horse Artillery. The civilian was said to have ‘dived for cover’ and survived consequently.

⁶⁵⁷ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference 147.

⁶⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, reference 1168.

⁶⁵⁹ ‘Night of Blasts in Derry Area, *Belfast Telegraph*, 11 August 1971, p.9; ‘Act Like Christians – Mother’s Plea’, *Belfast Telegraph*, 12 August 1971, p.5; *Fortnight*, No. 23 (Sep. 3, 1971), p.13; Deutsch and Magowan, *Volume 1*, p.119; McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 100.

The PIRA also tried to avoid causing collateral damage by warning civilians to avoid actions that would put them at risk of being harmed by the armed struggle. It was reported in the weekly Head Quarters 3 Infantry Brigade Intelligence Summary for the period that on 3 June 1973, a pamphlet issued by '2nd Bn Provisional IRA, Crossmaglen' for the attention of the local public had been found in Crossmaglen. It included warnings to civilians to avoid coming within 50 yds of any member of the 'Occupation Forces in the North of Ireland', or the general vicinity of what they might otherwise have suspected to be an abandoned vehicle for 'it could be fatal'.⁶⁶⁰

During operations the PIRA would sometimes employ one or more volunteers to act as look-out – often junior parties – who could help to identify any obstacles to the attainment of their objectives which could include, the unexpected arrival of a civilian at the scene. There are instances when the PIRA claimed that they decided to postpone or abandon an operation for this very reason, although it is not usually possible to find further corroborating to substantiate these claims.⁶⁶¹ An exception to this being the example of the killing of Private Geoffrey Mark Curtis in West Belfast in 1983 because it was noted at the inquest that the 15lb device which killed the soldier was originally intended to target a regular police patrol, but that the PIRA delayed using the radio-control activated device against the RUC officers because a schoolgirl had been walking close by.⁶⁶² Evidence that binoculars and radio-communication devices was inadvertently left by the PIRA at the scene

⁶⁶⁰ 'Head Quarters 3 Infantry Brigade Intelligence Summary No 24/73 for the period 11-18 June 1973', Published 19 June 1973, TNA, WO305 4214.

⁶⁶¹ It has not been possible, for instance, for the author to find evidence to support the PIRA's claims referenced in McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 950, 2187-2190.

⁶⁶² *Ibid.*, reference: 2541.

of the crime is perhaps some level of indication that the PIRA was equipped to and might have also chosen to act in this manner on other occasions as they claimed.⁶⁶³

Conclusion

The academic literature commonly highlights that non-state belligerent parties to conflict tend to adopt less sophisticated military tactics and rely on stealth to compensate for their material inferiority.⁶⁶⁴ The evidence presented above confirms that the PIRA was no different in this regard.

The volume and scale of their operations was subject to the number of members they had trained and recruited, and the volume and type of weapons they were able to acquire to equip them with. The fact that the PIRA perpetrated a higher number of shooting and bombing attacks in 1972 than 1970 has much to do with material resources. However, the annual volume of activity perpetrated by the PIRA is not a robust indication of their operational capacity over time. It is more revealing, to compare the scale and scope of individual operations that were perpetrated at different moments in time.

Attacks against the security forces and economic sabotage operations were a constant feature of the armed struggle in this period. The degree of firepower the PIRA employed to target people or property in 1979 could far exceed that which was used earlier in their

⁶⁶³ Barzilai, *Volume 2*, p.188, O'Callaghan, *The Informer*, pp.92-99.

⁶⁶⁴ See, for instance, the literature survey and the multi-case study work presented in Biddle, *Nonstate Warfare*, pp.31-33.

campaign, and their operations could also take longer to plan and prepare. One of the principal reasons why this was the case was that the equipment and armour used by the police and military was upgraded in this period. Essentially, the PIRA needed to increase the degree of firepower they employed to target soldiers and police officers or introduce new weapons or tactical innovations to catch them off-guard if they were to continue to have the same impact over time. In this sense, that fact that PIRA operations in 1979 had changed so dramatically in scale and scope from those that the organisation perpetrated at the beginning of the decade, reduces the value of assessing the strength of the armed struggle against the volume of activity that was perpetrated annually.

The relationship between material factors and the outcome of PIRA operations is to some extent obvious. The PIRA was better able to produce outcomes they desired – material damage to targeted property and the killing of targeted individuals – when they acquired quality weapons and had the skills or experience necessary to fire them with precision. Poor quality weapons, poor training, or a lack of experience could result in outcomes the PIRA did not desire: “own goals” and collateral damage. However, we can only observe the extent to which the PIRA was able to produce the outcomes they desired (and avoid those they did not) over time if we disaggregate security force fatalities from collateral damage. For this reason, aggregate annual fatality statistics is a poor indication of operational capacity.

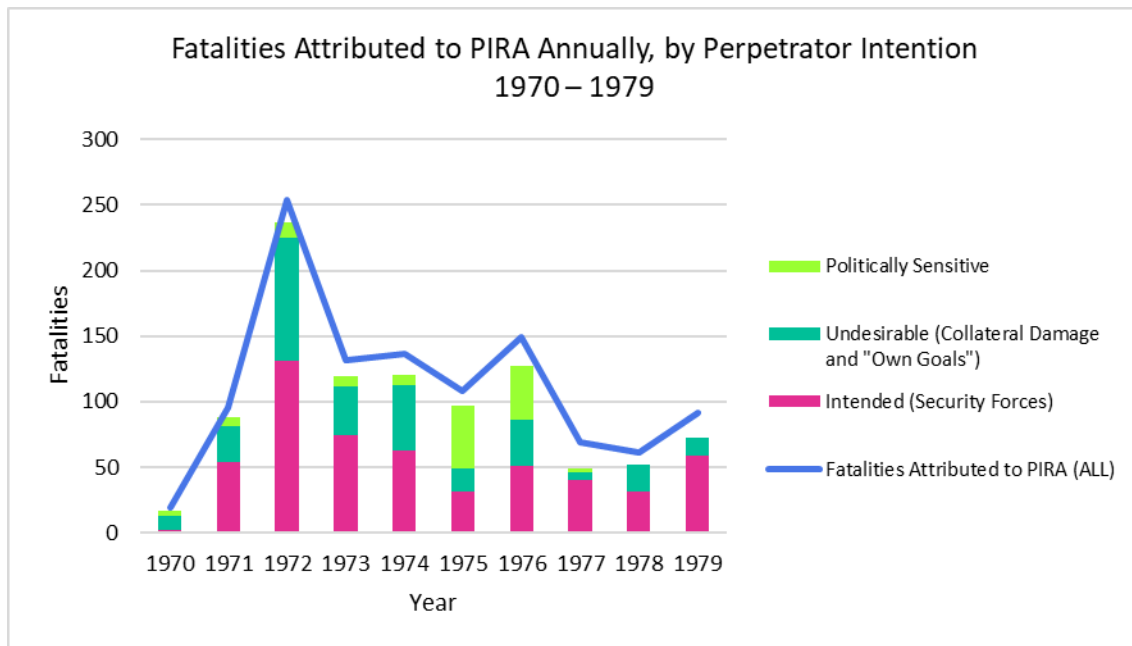


Figure 3.12 Fatalities Attributed to PIRA Annually, by Perpetrator Intention 1970 – 1979.

Source: Kowalski, DPhil Dataset.

Figure 3.12 demonstrates that the percentage of fatalities attributed to the PIRA that were desired (security force fatalities, represented in pink) only slightly exceeds that which was undesired (collateral damage and “own goals”, represented in dark green) in 1972. By contrast, collateral damage represents only a minor share of the total fatalities attributed to the PIRA later in the decade. This shift is not apparent if we only assess the total fatalities attributed to the PIRA in this period (represented by the blue line).

It is worth noting also that the extent to which the focus of the armed struggle changed during the 1975-1976 ceasefire will be obscured unless we also identify and disaggregate fatalities attributed to the PIRA that represent elements of the campaign which were (for reasons discussed in part I) limited or politically sensitive. Fatalities resulting from the PIRA’s campaign of sectarian assassinations and violent confrontations with republican or loyalist

paramilitaries (indicated in lime green in Figure 3.12) occurred primarily in 1975 and 1976 and represent a major share of the deaths caused by the PIRA in those years.

It can also be important to distinguish between the total number of fatalities and the total number of fatal incidents in which they occurred when analysing the character of a campaign of political violence quantitatively. Collateral damage resulting from bungled endeavours to target commercial properties are the starkest example of the disparity between the annual volume of fatalities and the number of fatal incidents resulting from the PIRA campaign. The total volume of civilians killed annually by these means (shown in figure 3.13 in dark magenta and green) far exceeds the volume of incidents in which they occurred. By contrast civilians killed by off-target or ricochet bullets fired by the PIRA (at other targets) were usually single cases.⁶⁶⁵ Likewise, in the incidents when collateral damage occurred because of an indiscriminate weapon or tactic having been used by the PIRA, a single civilian fatality was normally the result.⁶⁶⁶ The major exception to this was the tripwire device that killed five civilians at the BBC transmitter on Brougher Mountain in February 1971.⁶⁶⁷ The implication is that if we fail to distinguish between fatalities and fatal incidents in the data, we risk conflating a few deadly incidents with an overinflated sense of the lethality of PIRA violence in those years – especially after 1972 when the total volume of incidents is decreasing.

⁶⁶⁵ See, for example, McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 155, 184, 190, 225, 119, 443, 272, 324, 347, 386, 473, 482, 542, 960, 961, 858, 922, 1197, 989, 1003, 1183, 1426, 1508, 1858.

⁶⁶⁶ Two teenagers are killed by the abandoned car bomb at Three Steps on 10 March 1974, and two civilians are killed by the car-accident/lure bombing attack at Cookstown on 7 February 1976 (see McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 1025, 1029, 1610-1611) but most other examples resulted in a single civilian fatality. *Ibid.*, references: 263, 373, 572, 598, 947, 779, 842, 895, 935, 1044, 1074, 1136, 1503, 1493, 1634, 1758, 1747, 1852, 1853, 1797, 1906, 1971, 2048, 1985, 2052, 2055, 2123.

⁶⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, references: 55-59.

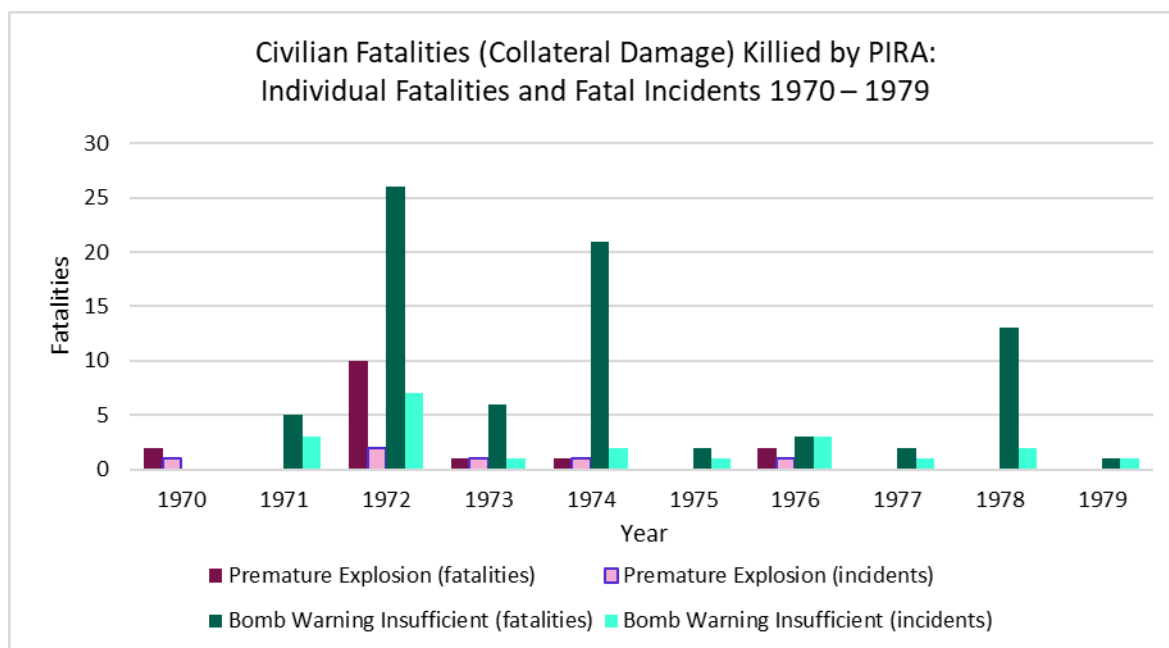


Figure 3.13 Civilian Fatalities (Collateral Damage) Killed by PIRA: Individual Fatalities and Fatal Incidents 1970 – 1979.

Source: Kowalski, DPhil Dataset.

Figure 3.14 demonstrates that by contrast, most of the security force fatalities occurred in separate incidents; multiple security-force fatalities occurred in only 16% of the 422 incidents in which they were killed.⁶⁶⁸ However, there were multi-fatality events that resulted from the PIRA's campaign against security-force personnel which can be important to identify and account for in our assessment of the PIRA campaign.

⁶⁶⁸ NB: 11 of these 422 fatal incidents also involved civilian fatalities attributed to PIRA and will therefore overlap with other categories of discussion. 1 incident also involved a civilian fatality that resulted from soldiers returning fire.

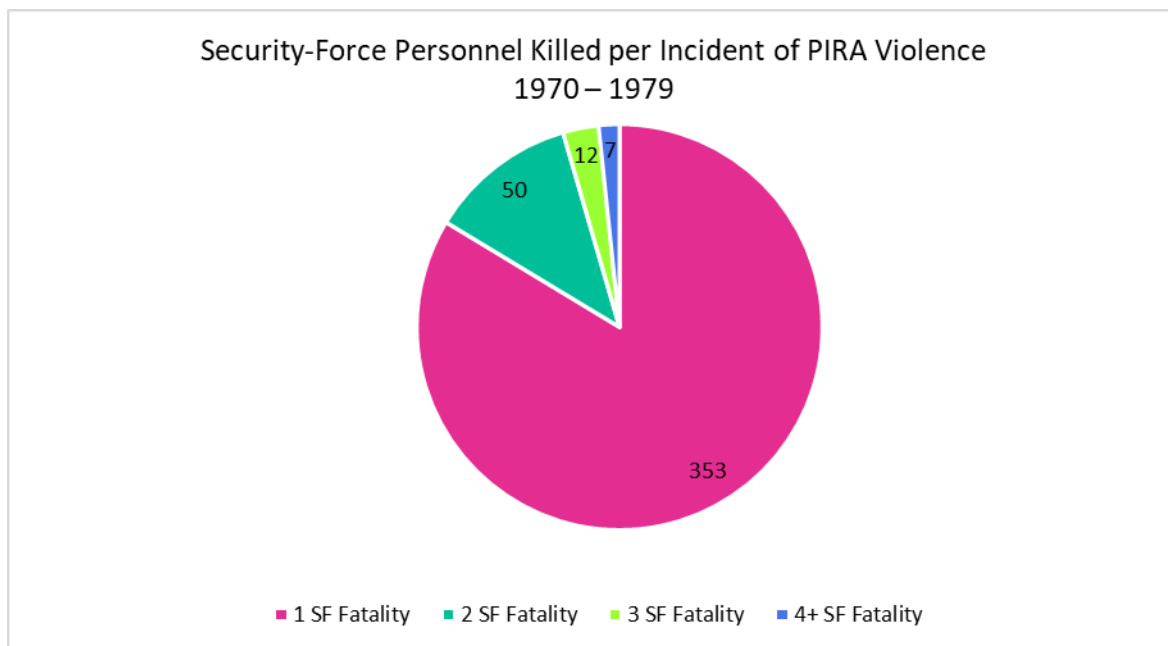


Figure 3.14. Security-Force Personnel Killed per Incident of PIRA Violence 1970 – 1979.
 Source: Kowalski, DPhil Dataset, (2022).

The incidents when British army personnel were killed in 1972 and 1979 are the biggest outlier in this regard. A few ‘spectacular’ incidents claimed a high number of security-force fatalities: five off-duty soldiers were killed by a victim-operated car bomb on 18 May 1973; nine off-duty soldiers in the coach bomb attack on the M62 motorway (England) in April 1974; five off-duty soldiers died in the 1974 pub bombing attacks in Guildford and Woolwich (England); four soldiers were killed by a rural IED attack at Forkhill on 17 July 1975, 18 soldiers died at the two-stage Narrow Water bomb attack on 27 August 1979; and eight soldiers were killed in two other IED attacks in 1979.⁶⁶⁹ The implication is that in the years where there are fewer security-force fatalities overall, multi-fatality events can provide a skewed account of the impact of PIRA violence on the security forces. Figure 3.15

⁶⁶⁹ McKittrick, *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 848, 1198, 1052, 1411, 2136, 2092, 2187.

demonstrates that 1979 is a good case in point because it was a year in which PIRA violence proved very deadly for the security forces on a small number of occasions.

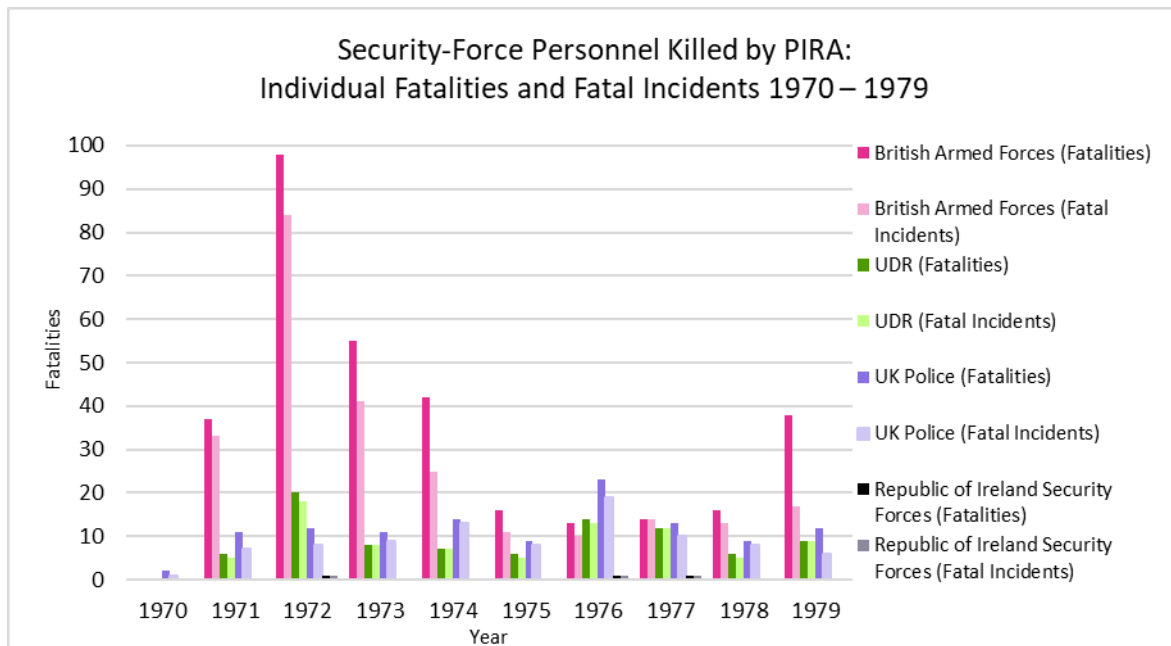


Figure 3.15 Security-Force Personnel Killed by PIRA: Individual Fatalities and Fatal Incidents 1970 – 1979.
Source: Kowalski, DPhil Dataset, (2022).

Still Figure 3.15 demonstrates that by the end of the 1970s the PIRA had the capacity to inflict a high toll of security force fatalities in a single assault. The PIRA were also able to cause extensive amount of material damage with their IED, rocket or mortar attacks at this time. In this sense, the scale of (intended) destruction the PIRA inflicted per incident in 1979 is quite simply not comparable with that which resulted from their campaign in 1972. The relationship between material factors and the outcome of consequences of the PIRA campaign is, however, complicated by evidence to suggest that some of the security force fatalities attributed to the PIRA resulted from incidents when the PIRA had not used especially powerful weapons or innovative tactics.

ATOs were directly responsible for saving the lives of their colleagues from the devices the PIRA had planted to cause them harm. They were tasked to investigate a high number of suspect devices; some were real, others were hoax. The fact that IED disposal (IEDD) protocols dictated that each suspect device should be treated as a real threat by the bomb disposal unit until proven otherwise, meant that on the vast majority of occasions the ATO survived. However, it also meant that each suspected IED incident took longer to investigate. For this reason, the PIRA was able to easily amplify the burden they placed on the security forces by planting dummy devices and making hoax calls – tactics which incidentally involved little to no direct costs for the PIRA.⁶⁷⁰

ATOs were essentially overburdened with work in this period. Consequently, there could be a long delay between a suspect device being identified and them actually attending the scene to begin their investigation – during which soldiers, police (or civilians) could potentially come into contact with the device. There is evidence to suggest that soldiers and police officers did not always or take actions that were deemed to be safe in the interim, and there were occasions when fatalities resulted for this reason.

The Officer Commanding of 48 Field Squadron RE, who attended to the scene of a premature explosion which killed the PIRA volunteer attempting to conceal the device in a wooded area near Rosslea (Co Fermanagh) on 10 May 1973, was reportedly ‘horrified at the

⁶⁷⁰ Former ATO Peter Gurney reported, for example that from 1973 onwards ‘it was not unusual for the Metropolitan Police to receive up to 200 hoax calls a day.....we had no way of finding out what was real and what was not’. Gurney, *Braver Men*, p.150.

total disregard of RUC in the area of explosion to the possibilities of booby traps and unexploded mines.’⁶⁷¹

Detective-Constable Love was killed on 6 October 1975 when searching the Roe View Inn near Limavady after the device which two armed PIRA volunteers had left had seemingly failed to explode after the 10-minute warning had elapsed.⁶⁷² Love must have thought that that this device, like so many others, was either a hoax or a dud – however, it appears that he was, tragically mistaken.

And on 19 November 1973, soldiers who were tasked to guard a derelict farmhouse near the village of Cullyhanna (Co. Armagh) that was suspected to contain an explosive device were killed after they became frustrated and took matters into their own hands:

By eight o’clock the next morning there was still no sign of the ATO, and the troops on the ground were starting to get impatient. A discussion ensued between the two senior soldiers present, Captain William Watson, 28, and Sergeant James Strothers, 31. Shortly after eight o’ clock, with the ATO still on route, the two entered the house, with a view to lift any arms or ammunition concealed inside. Within seconds of stepping inside, they were dead. A massive explosion destroyed the farmhouse, killing the two soldiers instantly.⁶⁷³

The fact that these cases could occur in quick succession demonstrates that PIRA violence could prove lethal even when the perpetrator was recycling the same tactic repeatedly. In 1972 and 1973 the PIRA inflicted multiple fatalities on the security forces by planting a victim-operated IED (VOIED) in a derelict cottage then making a false report to the police

⁶⁷¹ 10 May 1973, reference: 31, ‘HQ3 Diary May 73’, TNA, WO 305/4213.

⁶⁷² McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 1490.

⁶⁷³ Smith, *3-2-1 Bomb Gone*, p.112.

about suspicious activity in the area to lure soldiers or police towards it: six were killed in four separate attacks that used this tactic between 25 October 1972 and 20 June 1973.⁶⁷⁴ Former Bomb Disposal Expert, Colonel Steve Smith explained that over time and through painful experience that Army did begin to adapt to this threat. Smith also remarked, however, that:

By this time, the Army should have known better and, indeed, lives would have been saved if only the correct procedures had been followed.⁶⁷⁵

It is also evident that the bomb disposal experts themselves were not immune to fatal errors in the field: seventeen bomb-disposal experts were killed while on active service during the Troubles.⁶⁷⁶ Accounts of the circumstances in which they lost their lives make clear that there were occasions when the victim had failed to follow IED disposal (IEDD) protocols to the letter.⁶⁷⁷ However, it is also clear that they were under enormous pressure, often exhausted, and working in one of only a few professions where mistakes in the workplace are so critically dangerous to the employee. Colonel Smith explained:

The sad fact is that, at the critical moment, almost all the deceased made a fatal error that led to their deaths. This is hardly surprising. The pressures placed upon the operator are enormous.⁶⁷⁸

It is highly pertinent that ATOs were overburdened with work because of the high volume of real and hoax IED incidents they were tasked to attend, or in other words, as a direct result of PIRA activity. The implication is that the impact of the armed struggle was compounded

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid., references: 658, 675-676, 838, 841, 880-881, 902.

⁶⁷⁵ Smith, *3-2-1 Bomb Gone*, pp.111-113.

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid., p.227.

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid., pp.211-228.

⁶⁷⁸ Smith, *3-2-1 Bomb Gone*, p.227.

when the sheer volume of individual security incidents the PIRA created was higher than that to which the security forces could respond. High-profile examples of cases when civilians were killed because the PIRA overestimated how many bombs they could plant at the same time without collateral damage occurring (including Bloody Friday) have already drawn attention to this point to some extent – but have done so only, in an altogether different and more exceptional scenario. The impact of high-volume periods of activity on the security forces have been overlooked, by comparison. In this sense, perhaps one of the most unnoticed aspects of the armed struggle is that PIRA bombs could be just as dangerous when they were planted on masse as when they were individually, very powerful.

It is worth noting at this stage that the fact that security force personnel (and civilians) could take actions that altered the trajectory of events and, therefore, could have direct agency in shaping the eventual outcome of a PIRA attack is an interesting and complicated issue – which will be discussed at length in part III of the thesis.

Material factors also played an important role in determining the micro-dynamics of PIRA operations. When we examine the PIRA's behaviour in detail it is clear that there were a number of different ways that they tailored their operations with the specific intention of attaining the three primary objectives that were outlined above. The characteristics of PIRA weapons, their targets, and the environments in which they operated played a role in shaping the way the volunteers decided to apply violence because they presented various obstacles or challenges to the perpetrator. As such, it is interesting to consider which type of weapon and environment had been involved in fatal incidents of PIRA violence and what

this can tell us about the role these factors played in determining the outcome of their operations.

Urban environments are most densely populated and so it is no surprise that the majority of fatalities occurred in larger towns or cities (including Belfast or Derry).

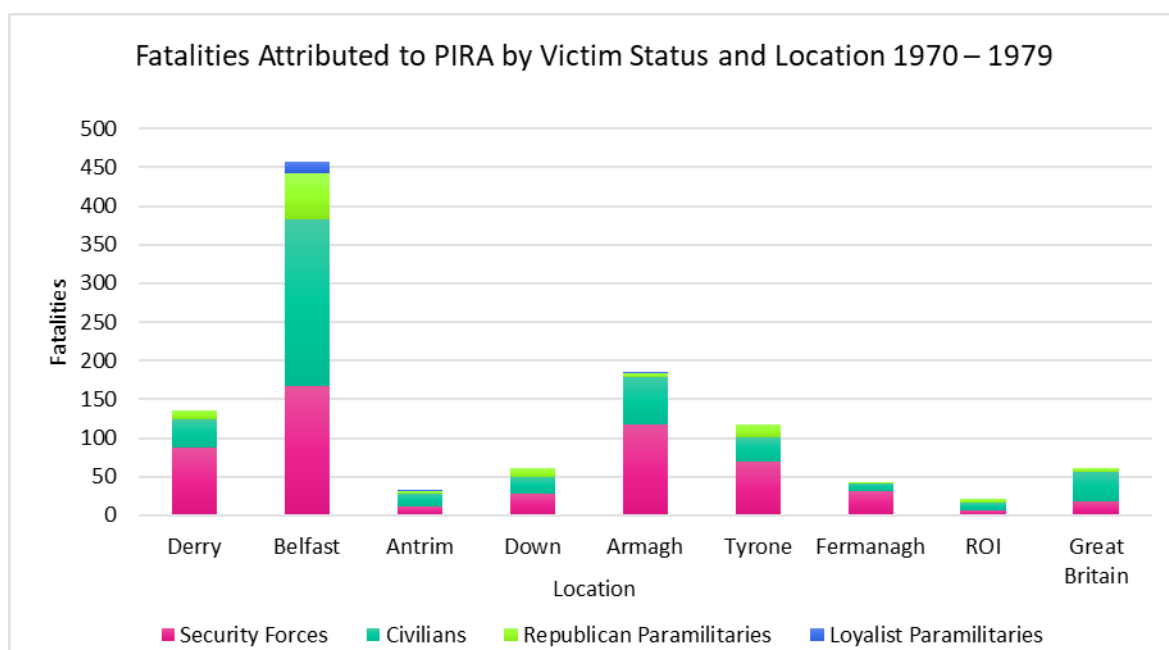


Figure 3.16 Fatalities Attributed to PIRA by Victim Status and Location 1970 – 1979.
Source: Kowalski, DPhil Dataset.

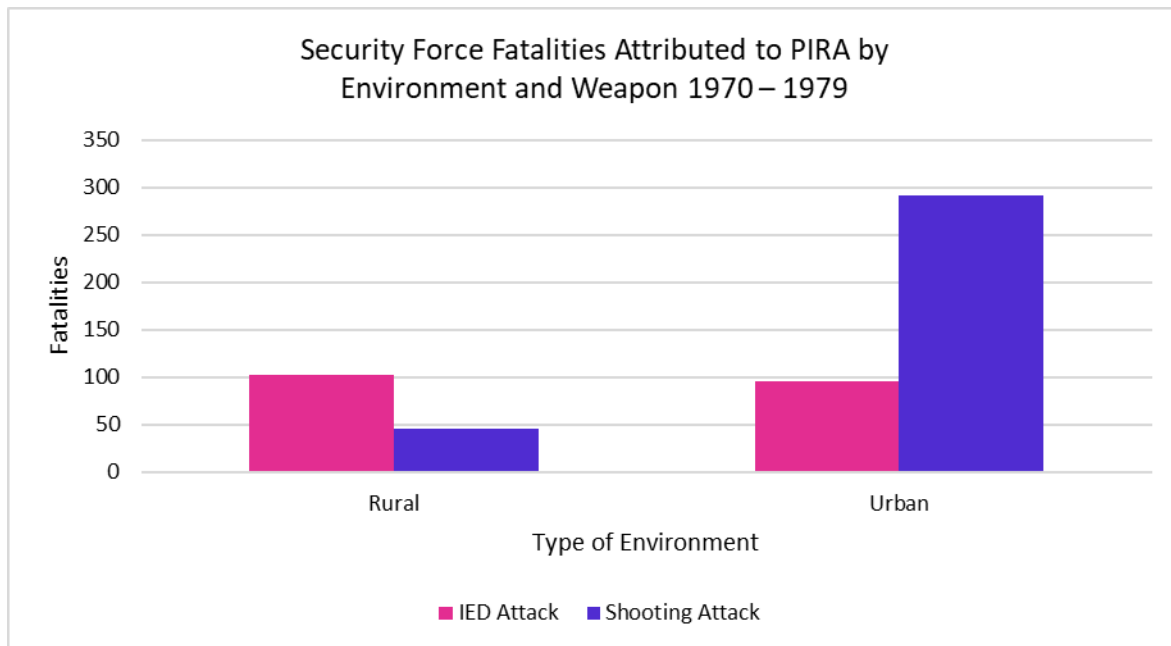


Figure 3.17 Security Force Fatalities Attributed to PIRA by Environment and Weapon 1970 – 1979.
Source: Kowalski, DPhil Dataset.

Figure 3.17 demonstrates that the most common type of incident to claim the lives of security-force personnel was urban shooting attacks.⁶⁷⁹ There was commonly a higher volume of soldiers or police present on the urban streets than in the countryside, and so there was inevitably an urban bias in the geographical distribution of security-force fatalities overall. However, rural IED attacks claimed the highest toll of security force victims per incident which is why there were a higher proportion of fatalities resulting from IEDs than firearms in rural spaces overall.

The civilians who died because of PIRA violence – both via targeted assassination and as collateral damage – were, for the most part, ordinary unarmed civilians. And so, it is

⁶⁷⁹ The type of environment (rural versus urban) was assessed by the author by pinpointing the location of each attack by combing the primary source records, then using a combination of maps and images (including satellite, via Google Earth) to assess the characteristics of the space. Only environments that were in the countryside (including rural single-carriageways) and at least 500 meters away from the nearest residential or commercial property were coded as 'rural', everything else was coded as urban.

unsurprising that to find an urban bias in the distribution of these civilian casualties. This is apparent, for example, in figures 3.18 and 3.19 (by the high numbers of fatalities that occurred in Belfast compared to more border counties like Tyrone and Fermanagh) and demonstrated in figures 3.20 and 3.21 by the volume of incidents of PIRA violence that resulted in civilian casualties in different types of environments (rural versus urban).⁶⁸⁰

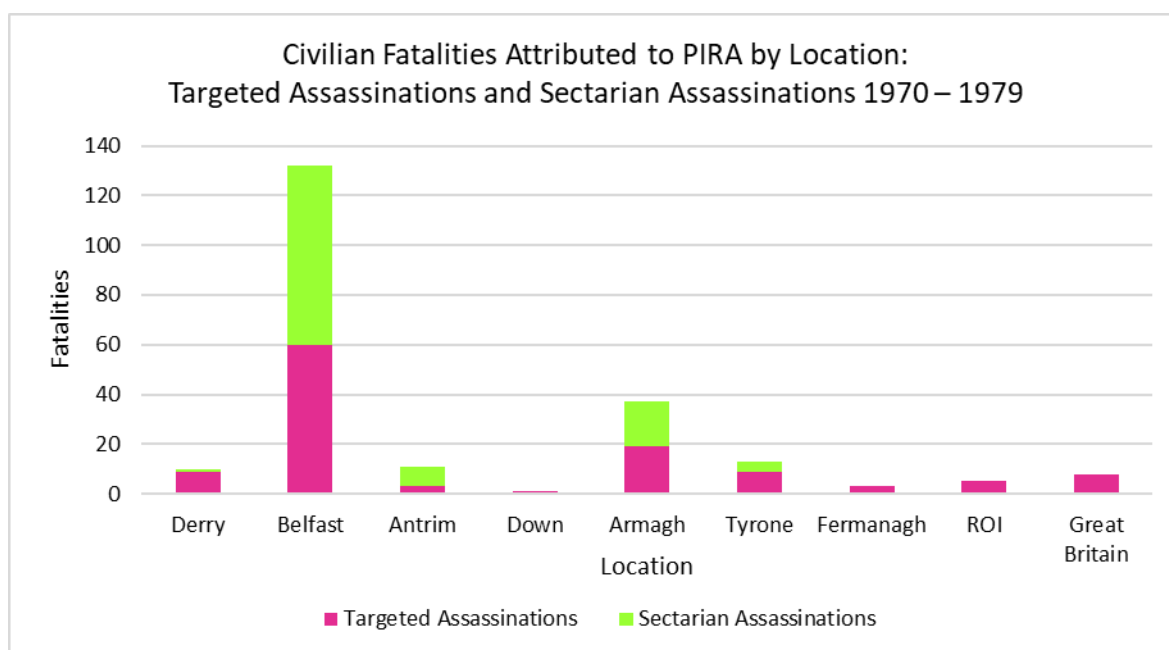


Figure 3.18 Civilian Fatalities Attributed to PIRA by Location: Targeted Assassinations and Sectarian Assassinations 1970 – 1979.

Source: Kowalski, DPhil Dataset.

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid.

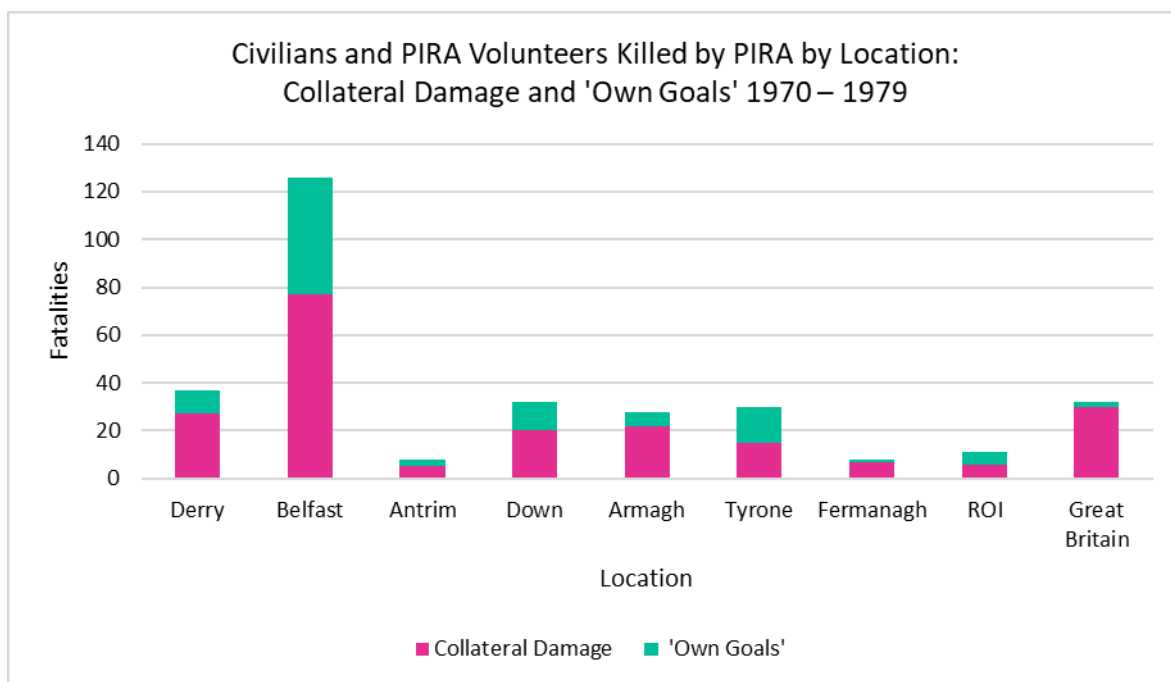


Figure 3.19 Civilians and PIRA Volunteers Killed by PIRA by Location: Collateral Damage and 'Own Goals' 1970 – 1979.

Source: Kowalski, DPhil Dataset.

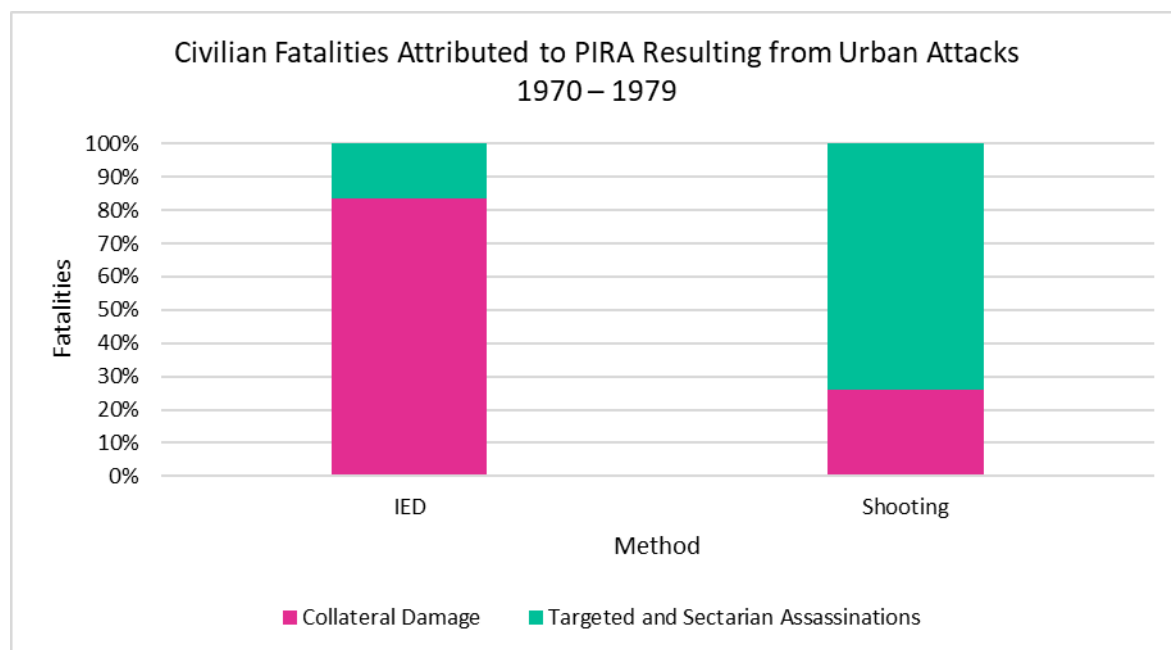


Figure 3.20 Civilian Fatalities Attributed to PIRA Resulting from Urban Attacks 1970 – 1979.

Source: Kowalski, DPhil Dataset.

Figure 3.20 reveals that civilians who were killed by the PIRA because they became a victim of targeted assassination – sectarian or otherwise – were more likely to be killed in an urban

shooting attack. This is because less fire power was required to take the life of an unarmed civilian, firearms were easier to control than IEDs, and shooting attacks could be faster to prepare and execute than a bombing operation. Figure 3.20 also reveals that, by contrast collateral damage was most commonly the result of an urban IED attack. In a general sense, this is unsurprising because PIRA could apply a higher degree of lethal force with their IEDs than their firearms. It is worth noting that this preliminary insight, about the weapons and environments used in PIRA attacks in which civilian fatalities occurred, is lost if we fail to disaggregate victims of targeted assassination from victims whose death could sadly be categorised as collateral damage. It is unclear, for example, in figure 3.21 that a significant proportion of civilian fatalities that resulted from urban shooting attacks were targeted assassinations (and intentional) as opposed to civilians who had been caught in the crossfire (collateral damage).

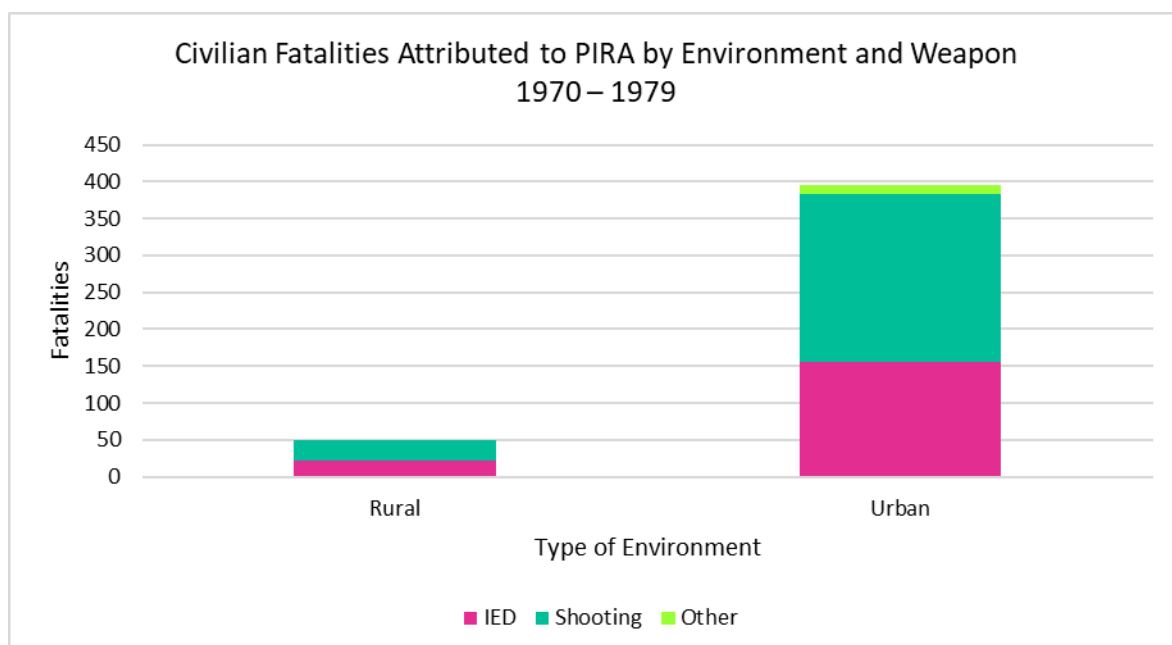


Figure 3.21 Civilian Fatalities Attributed to PIRA by Environment and Weapon 1970 – 1979.

Source: Kowalski, DPhil Dataset.

The way the PIRA tailored their tactics to navigate material obstacles is revealing of their priorities. The decisions the PIRA made regarding the weapons and tactics they would combine to attack different targets in different spaces indicate that preserving their own interests was prioritised above their other objectives. And the fact that collateral damage was a prospective outcome of their attacks against targeted people or property (even despite the steps they took to avoid civilian casualties) suggests they were willing to take risks in this regard. The further implications and consequences of those decisions are explored in the next part of the thesis.

Part III

The Consequences of Armed Struggle

In part II it was argued that in most cases PIRA operations had three primary objectives: to successfully strike the intended target, to preserve their own interests, and to avoid (or minimise) collateral damage. The political incentives for attaining these objectives were outlined in part I of the thesis. The material obstacles to their attainment, and the various mechanisms that the PIRA employed to circumnavigate them, were explored in part II. In this sense, the first two parts of the thesis have principally been concerned with explaining the design of PIRA violence – i.e., how and why they selected their targets and tactics. The case study material that is presented in part III will, by contrast, examine the implications and consequences of those decisions.

Ability and Willingness

The study of violence perpetrated by non-state groups is a burgeoning field of research. Collectively scholars have examined violence across different periods of time, in various parts of the globe, via diverse sources and methodologies, and through different disciplinary lenses.⁶⁸¹ In the past few decades, the nature and meaning of insurgent violence has been portrayed and evaluated in the literature in a myriad of ways – from barbaric to rational.⁶⁸² More recently, the explainable functions and strategic logic behind various acts of internecine, guerrilla, or terrorist violence have become accentuated.

⁶⁸¹ Richard Bessel, *Violence: A Modern Obsession* (London, 2015), pp. 11-18.

⁶⁸² Stathis Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence* (Oxford, 2006).

Paul Richards's revisionist theory, retrospectively referred to as the 'rational-actor' thesis made a dramatic departure from the racist undertones of new-barbarism when attesting purpose, logic and reason behind what had previously been dismissed as mere barbarity.⁶⁸³ Richards's conclusion that the tactics of the rebels employed in the Sierra Leonean conflict were 'fully effective in disorientating, traumatizing, demoralizing' and 'devilishly well-calculated' resonates with more recent works which seek to explain the logic in the strategy of civilian-centric international terrorism.⁶⁸⁴ Neumann, for example, breaks down the process employed by Islamist groups such as Al Qaeda into three phases: disorientation, target response, and gaining legitimacy.⁶⁸⁵ And, most recently, there has been a turn towards inter-disciplinary approaches to understanding the role of emotions in the perpetration of violence. David Keen, for instance, applies lessons from the work of psychoanalyst James Gilligan – whose work has concerned high-security prisoners in the American prison system – to the Sierra Leone civil war (1991-2002) to attest the importance of understanding the role of shame in the perpetration of civil war violence.⁶⁸⁶ And, Kieran Mitton has advanced a thesis that argues the role of multiple 'emotions'; the emotion of disgust, for example, is closely associated with the notion of shame and has played a role in acclimatising RUF combatants to violence by giving them a narrative of justification.⁶⁸⁷

⁶⁸³ Paul Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, Youth, and Resources in Sierra Leone* (Oxford, 1996), p. xx.

⁶⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, xvi

⁶⁸⁵ Peter Neumann and M.L.R. Smith, *The Strategy of Terrorism: How it Works and Why it Fails* (London, 2008), pp. 31-55.

⁶⁸⁶ David Keen, *Conflict & Collusion in Sierra Leone* (Oxford, 2005), pp.56-83; David Keen, *"Since I Am a Dog, Beware My Fangs": Beyond a 'Rational Violence' Framework in the Sierra Leonean War* (London, 2002).

⁶⁸⁷ Kieran Mitton, *Rebels in a Rotten State* (London, 2015), pp.177-179,181-225.

The subject of violence remains divisive. This is evident, for example, in criticism of publications that use (or are perceived to use) a detached or clinical tone to discuss the phenomenon. Thomas Nagel's review of Richard English's *Does Terrorism Work* (2016), for example, concluded:

the main thing missing from English's response is any sense that there might be something intrinsically wrong in deliberately killing and maiming innocent civilians as a means to bring about even a desirable outcome.⁶⁸⁸

This comment serves as a stark reminder of how challenging it can be for historians to write about violence for, even though they commonly caveat their monographs with words to the effect of 'explaining is not excusing; understanding is not forgiving'⁶⁸⁹ – the absence of the sort of condemnatory tone we might expect in works of moral philosophy ensures that for some, the work remains a jarring read. The implication is that work by historians about violence may always prove divisive. However, the research findings presented in this thesis suggest that it may be possible to erode the contention that surrounds taboo subjects if it has arisen because a critical aspect of them has not been sufficiently addressed in the literature to date – which this author argues has been the case for the hitherto underexplored role that perpetrator agency and chance can play in determining the outcome of PIRA operations, including the civilian fatalities referred to throughout this thesis with divisive term, collateral damage.

⁶⁸⁸ Thomas Nagel, 'By Any Means or None', *London Review of Books*, 38/17, 8 September 2016.

⁶⁸⁹ C. Browning, *The Path to Genocide: Essays on Launching the Final Solution* (Cambridge, 1992), p.xx.

R.W. White was not inherently wrong when he attested that innocent civilians were not the intended target of PIRA violence, but were killed, on occasion, through malfunctioning weapons or other incompetence on the part of the perpetrator.

Organizations like the Irish Republican Army operate in an imperfect world — equipment, training, communications, and operational personnel are constrained — and this may lead to accidents and mistakes.⁶⁹⁰

However, White's claims were contested by other scholars including Steve Bruce:

Not being privy to the thoughts of the IRA men involved, I am in no position to know to what extent those killings are, in Sutton's classification, 'unintentional', but I do know enough about the effects of high explosive to know that no group which had a high regard for human life would use it.⁶⁹¹

One of the principal sources of objections raised against academic assessments of PIRA violence pertains to the description of collateral damage as an *unintended* outcome, or as having resulted from the PIRA's *mistakes*. This criticism highlights the dearth of meaningful examination of the extent to which the collateral damage was foreseeable, and the actions taken by the perpetrator were reasonable. The risks inherent in the wide variety of tactics employed by the PIRA are interesting to explore for this reason.

Any given act of PIRA violence could only result in one of a few different outcomes: PIRA operations could either be stillborn, abandoned, or thwarted by others; or the bombs and bullets they fired could hit or miss their targets, with or without further non-combatant casualties. Some outcomes were desired; others were not. In either case, the outcome was

⁶⁹⁰ White, 'An Assessment', p.38.

⁶⁹¹ Steve Bruce 'Victim selection in ethnic conflict: Motives and attitudes in Irish republicanism', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 9:1, (1997), p.61.

the product of a sequence of events, the likely occurrence of which depended on which weapons and actions the PIRA decided to combine to attack a particular target in a particular space.

The number of different combinations (of weapon, action, target, and environment) that were prospectively available for the PIRA to select grew over time as they acquired and manufactured a wider variety of weapons. Each choice did not provide the PIRA with an equal chance of successfully attaining their objectives: some options essentially guaranteed the PIRA would attain one of their three primary objectives, others could merely reduce the likelihood that they would fail. Crucially, most options had both cost and benefit implications for the PIRA that they needed to weigh accordingly. For this reason, the extent to which the PIRA were likely to attain all three primary objectives on any occasion, depended on how able and willing they had been to select the option that was most likely to yield both effective and discriminate results.

Effectiveness is a characteristic that is pertinent to all three of the PIRA's primary objectives. Discrimination, by contrast, is only pertinent to one: avoiding causing harm to non-combatants. For this reason, the latter is a useful way to categorise and the variety apparent in the design of PIRA operations and determine the order in which the case material is presented in part III. Accordingly, PIRA tactics will be described hereafter as falling on a spectrum from wholly discriminate tactics at one extreme, to wholly indiscriminate tactics at the other, and demonstrating varying degrees of recklessness in between.

The key characteristics of an operation which could be described as having been designed to use a discriminate targeting protocol include: weapons that are fired manually and fire instantaneously (as opposed to being programmed to fire ahead of time); weapons that are fit for purpose in terms of their stability, firepower and firing range; PIRA volunteers who have sufficient training and experience to have become proficient at firing said weapons in an accurate and timely manner; a location that is sufficiently remote that it was more or less guaranteed to not be occupied by civilians; and topographical and weather conditions which were sufficiently bright and clear for the PIRA to have good visibility in or over the theatre of their attack. If one or more elements of this recipe are compromised, the target discrimination protocol would have to be categorised as either reckless or indiscriminate accordingly.

The degree of risk that was incorporated into the design of PIRA operations varied. When the PIRA used low-powered or unstable weapons, were outnumbered by security force personnel, or lacked scope to take cover or camouflage themselves they were less likely to inflict the casualties or material damage they intended, and more likely to fail to escape harm or arrest themselves in the process. PIRA operation could have higher chance of resulting in collateral damage if the tactic relied upon forces outside their control to succeed, an indiscriminate weapon was used, or the attack was conducted near civilians.

The actual outcome of PIRA operations was not, however, necessarily commensurate with the degree of risk that was incorporated into the design; only the extent to which that risk materialised. One critical determinant in the outcome of PIRA operations was the quality of

the PIRA's conduct during the execution stage of the attack. At one extreme, the PIRA could apply violence with precision, at the other extreme they could mistime or misdirect their fire or fail to accurately complete some other critical aspect of the plan (such as providing full and accurate details in the bomb warning). Moreover, the outcome of PIRA operations was critically affected by the extent to which the volunteers had been both able and willing to execute violence in a precise and discriminating fashion. Another critical determinant in the outcome of the operation was the factors outside of the PIRA's control. These include, for example, the actions and reactions of others – which can be highly unpredictable.

The fact that the PIRA had agency in determining the outcome of an operation when they selected their targets and tactics, or fired their weapons at them subsequently, is clear. The subject of PIRA agency becomes more complicated and interesting, however, when we consider that the risks inherent in the design of an operation pertain to things that could be both in or outside of the PIRA's control, and more or less foreseeable to and foreseen by them ahead of time.

The prospective risks (of failure or an indiscriminate outcome) associated with the tactics used by the PIRA can often be described as having been foreseeable (to a reasonable person). The extent to which they were actually foreseen by the PIRA volunteers involved is difficult to determine precisely, but is an important consideration, nevertheless. The PIRA might have scope to claim that they had not foreseen a particular risk, for example, when they introduced a novel and unproven technology or tactic. The same claim could not be

made, however, when the PIRA used weapons and tactics that had proven unreliable on other occasions.

For all these reasons, it is argued that the character of the armed struggle depended on the PIRA's ability and willingness to plan and execute violence in a manner that was likely to produce accurate and discriminate results. The *Ability and Willingness Nexus* diagram (figure 4.1 is presented below to illustrate the authors argument and facilitate a richer discussion of the points raised above.

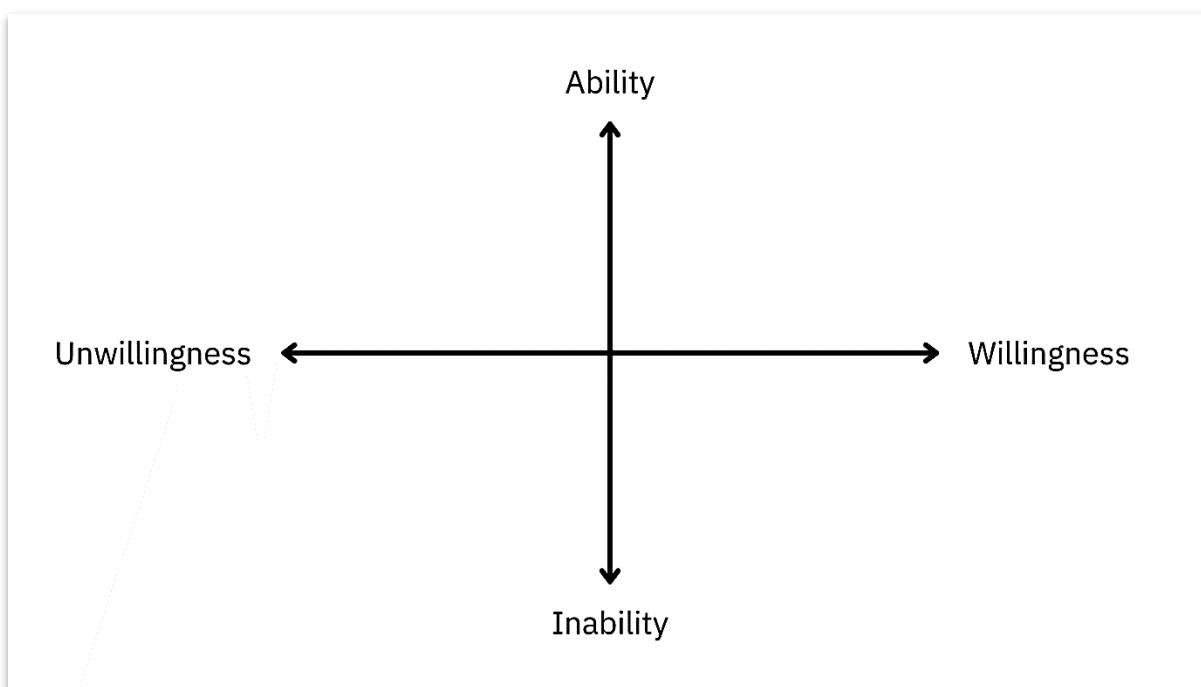


Figure 4.1. The Ability and Willingness Nexus.

It is important to note that the *Ability and Willingness Nexus* is a theoretical framework as opposed to an exact tool for measurement or categorisation. The argument has three

separate components (and 16 possible combinations). There are two stages of the operation that contribute to the outcome: the design and the execution. There are two critical qualities of military conduct – efficacy and discrimination – which might occur at each stage of the operation: ranging on a spectrum from wholly effective and discriminate at one extreme to wholly ineffective or indiscriminate at the other. Finally, there are two key types of behaviour – ability or willingness – that the PIRA might exhibit in relation to each quality of military conduct and at each stage of the attack.

Depending on how able or willing the volunteers had been to design and execute violence in a manner that was effective and discriminate a PIRA operation could (in theory) be categorised as falling within one of the four quadrants of the *Ability and Willingness Nexus*. It could also be positioned within that quadrant depending on the intensity of risk on either count.

The *Ability and Willingness Nexus* is a framework that facilitates a rich analysis of the diverse characteristics of PIRA violence on a scale which is compatible with those applied in other academic disciplines, and national or international legal systems for assessing violent and war crimes. These include, for example, just war theory, the law of armed conflict, and the British criminal justice system because they each provide a structure with which to assess the reasonableness of actions taken by the perpetrator(s) that probes their intentions and the degree of foresight with they took certain risks.⁶⁹²

⁶⁹² A.A., Haque, 'Killing with Discrimination', in S., Bazargan-Forward and S.C., Rickless, *The Ethics of War* (Oxford, 2017), pp.165-170; Anne Schwenkenbecher, 'Collateral Damage and the Principle of Due Care',

The case studies that follow are presented to support the opening arguments that have been presented in this third and final part of this thesis. They reveal that the tactics employed by the PIRA could range from those which had a high risk of failure or collateral damage occurring to those with a high chance of success and a discriminate outcome resulting. However, the data presented in the conclusion does not reveal a simple relationship – or obvious correlation – between the risks inherent in the design of PIRA operations and the fatalities that resulted from the armed struggle.

Discriminate Tactics

The PIRA regularly launched anti-personnel attacks against police officers and soldiers in rural spaces such as open fields, and isolated country roads. Sometimes the PIRA achieved the outcome they had intended; other times things do not seem to have gone as planned. In any case, collateral damage was an extremely unlikely prospect. The sources suggest that each of the case studies presented in this section involved weapons that were manually fired, a location that was sufficiently far from civilians to prevent (physical) harm occurring to them directly or indirectly, and conditions that provided the PIRA with clear visibility over the theatre of their attack. Collectively, they provide a demonstration of how the risk posed to civilian safety could be significantly reduced, if not eliminated entirely, in this scenario.

These operations could vary in scale and scope depending on the nature of the target or the scenario in which they were being attacked. Smaller numbers of PIRA volunteers and lower-

Journal of Military Ethics, 13:1, (2014), pp.94-105; Gross, *The Ethics*; 'mens rea' in Jonathan Law (ed.), *A Dictionary of Law*, 9th edn. (Oxford, 2018), p.433; Jacqueline Martin, *Criminal Law: Key Facts Key Cases* (Abingdon, 2014), pp.18-24, 32-38, 149-163, 177-185.

capacity weapons were involved when targets were expected to be alone, unarmed, and unsuspecting, as was the case with part-time UDR Corporal, Frank Caddo, on the morning of 10 May 1973, when (two or three) PIRA gunmen pulled up to his property – a farm, located near the border between the Republic and Aghnacloy (Co. Tyrone) – in a green Ford 1100 car with the intention of killing him. The dynamics of the attack are no less than horrifying: the gunmen are reported to have opened fire initially, when Caddo was sat on his tractor, continued shooting at him as they chased him across an open field and into a hedge which marked its boundary.⁶⁹³ The gunmen responsible for perpetrating this frenzied fatal shooting assault could not have expected similar tactics to produce a discriminate outcome in different environment. For, as we will see in later examples of urban shooting attacks, off-target or ricochet bullets can easily maim or kill people in the surrounding area.

More firepower tended to be involved when the PIRA targeted groups of armed security force personnel, and there is reason to believe that there were times when the ‘spectacular’ target the PIRA had in mind did not present itself, and the PIRA were willing to deploy excessive force against individual soldiers who came within range of the weapons they had prepared. Certainly, the radio-controlled IED which exploded in a field at Clougher (a small rural village that is close to the border in Co. Tyrone) on 18 July 1973 had been designed with a much larger target in mind than a single dog handler from the Royal Tank Regiment, Bryan Criddle. The weapon, which consisted of six milk churns containing 600-800lb of home-made explosives apiece, was of a destructive capacity that was sufficient on other

⁶⁹³ ‘Head Quarters 3 Infantry Brigade Intelligence Summary 19/73, for the Period 7 - 14 May 1973’, TNA, WO 305/4213, p.1,18-19; 10 May 1973, reference: 5, ‘HQ3 Diary May 73’, TNA, WO 305/4213; 4 - 10 May 1973 in ‘NIO Summary 1973’, TNA, CJ 4/1024; McKittrick, et al., *Lost Lives*, reference: 836.

occasions to demolish armoured vehicles. The army is reported to have said the PIRA must have intended to 'wipe out an entire patrol.'⁶⁹⁴ It is possible that the incident is an example of new, increasingly cautious IED disposal processes working to place fewer soldiers in proximity of suspect devices. It is certainly an example of how the PIRA had freedom to use (disproportionately) excessive force in a rural environment without risk of collateral damage occurring.

The PIRA certainly took advantage of this freedom – they launched a significant campaign against militarised vehicles in the countryside. Many fatalities were inflicted as a result, but the PIRA did not by any means succeed to penetrate armoured cars or inflict military casualties on every occasion. According to a data included in a 1978 military report on security incidents in South Armagh, between January 1973 and November 1978, there were 16 explosives attacks on military vehicles in the county which caused 6 military fatalities but were mostly non-fatal.⁶⁹⁵

A case in point from nearby county Fermanagh occurred on 20 March 1972. On this day a 100lb PIRA bomb exploded near Rosslea as a Ferret armoured car passed by. The vehicle was blasted off the road, and the turret was ripped from main vehicle and blown 30 yards away, but the vehicle was not damaged beyond the point whereby it could not be driven away from the scene.⁶⁹⁶ A soldier (2nd Lieutenant of the 16/5th Queens' Lancers) was flung

⁶⁹⁴ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 905.

⁶⁹⁵ 'Table 1 – S Armagh Summary Statistics 1 Jan 73 - 1 Jan 78' in PE Haskell (DSCIAD) for HQNI, 'Vehicles in South Armagh', 14 November 1978, TNA, CJ4/2854.

⁶⁹⁶ Barzilay, *Volume 1*, p.142.

from the vehicle, receiving a broken jaw and lacerations to his face in the process – injuries that were non-trivial but also non-fatal. There is no indication that the PIRA volunteers who fired the device were caught on this occasion, but there is evidence to suggest that failure to overwhelm the foot or vehicle patrol that the PIRA targeted could have more serious implications for the PIRA's own interests on other occasions.

The PIRA's landmine ambush attacks were not subtle – the explosions could be seen and heard by other soldiers that may be patrolling nearby – which meant that the PIRA could find themselves coming under fire from military personnel outside of those they had targeted unless they were able to quickly put sufficient distance between themselves and the explosions they caused. A case in point occurred on 7 April 1973 when the PIRA fired a 250lb command-wire device to target a military vehicle which was travelling down a country road at Tullyogallaghan (near Newtownhamilton, Co. Armagh), killing two members of the Anti-Tank Platoon.⁶⁹⁷ One of the primary reasons why one of the PIRA volunteers responsible for firing the bomb was caught and arrested in the aftermath was that there had been a foot patrol of soldiers within close range of the attack who, upon hearing the explosion, were able to get within close enough range of the attack site in time to shoot at the PIRA bombers who they could see were attempting to make their escape on foot; the bomber survived the gunshot wound he received to the head, but went on to be convicted for this and other crimes.⁶⁹⁸

⁶⁹⁷ 'Head Quarters 3 Infantry Brigade Intelligence Summary 14/73, for the Period 2 April - 9 April 1973', TNA, WO 305/4212; 6 - 12 April 1973 in 'NIO Summary 1973', TNA, CJ 4/1024; Morton, *Emergency Tour*, p.10-11; McKittrick, *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 816-817.

⁶⁹⁸ 'Provos Admit Mine Murder', *Belfast Newsletter*, 9 April 1973, p.1.

Sometimes the ambushes the PIRA planned to occur in rural spaces failed to achieve any or all of their aims because the weapons involved did not function as expected. An example occurred at approximately 23:15 on 12 June 1976 when the PIRA attacked an eight-person foot patrol of soldiers who were patrolling a quiet single carriageway that runs from Meigh, through Drumintee to Forkhill in South Armagh. On this occasion the weapon involved was a command-wire IED that consisted of an estimated 200lb of homemade explosive, which the PIRA detonated from a firing-point that was a few hundred meters away.⁶⁹⁹ It is reported that the soldiers, who had been patrolling the road since the early afternoon, making random vehicle checks, were not seriously injured when the bomb exploded, although several were knocked off their feet and are said to have 'received a considerable shock'.⁷⁰⁰ The Monthly Bulletin of Security Statistics for June 1976 highlights that the reason why a device containing this volume of explosives failed to cause significant injuries or death to soldiers who were on-foot was that it only 'partially' detonated.⁷⁰¹

On other occasions, PIRA IEDs malfunctioned well before those who had been planning to use them to target security force personnel had even begun to attempt to do so. Early on the morning of 10 May 1973 17-year-old Anthony Ahern, a PIRA volunteer from Cork was attempting to assemble a command-wire IED in a wooded area near Roslea (Co. Fermanagh).⁷⁰² It was believed that the intended target was an army foot patrol that crossed through this area on a regular basis. But it was Ahern himself who was ultimately to

⁶⁹⁹ Morton, *Emergency Tour*, p. 154.

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁰¹ June 1976 in 'NIO Summary 1975-1976', TNA, CJ 4/1237.

⁷⁰² 11 - 17 May 1973 in 'NIO Summary 1973', TNA, CJ 4/1024; 10 May 1973, 'HQ3 Diary May 73', TNA, WO 305/4213; McKittrick, *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 837.

fall victim to the weapon when three of the five claymore mines that he was attempting to bury exploded prematurely.

What the two previous examples indicate is that, while unstable PIRA weapons could pose a risk to the security forces and PIRA volunteers alike, they posed little danger to civilians if the malfunctions occurred in remote locations. Nevertheless, as we will come to see in latter sections, the fact that these weapons could be prepared in or transported through urban locations could very much place civilians in harm's way.

It was clearly important to the PIRA that their weapons were sufficiently powerful and functioning as expected for their rural ambush assaults to succeed. Other case studies highlight that the PIRA also needed to their fire weapons with precision, and plan a suitable escape route ahead of time, if they were going to succeed to attain their objectives on all counts.

The PIRA's campaign against military vehicles was described as by journalist David Barzilay as having been mounted with 'split-second timing' and 'very skilfully indeed'.⁷⁰³ However, there are some examples of attacks on military vehicles included in the journalists work when the PIRA missed their target entirely. In March 1971 Barzilay reports that the PIRA attempted to attack a patrol of two Ferret scout cars carrying soldiers of the 16th/5th Queens' Lancers who had been tasked with inspecting a cratered road close to the border

⁷⁰³ Barzilay, *Volume 1*, pp.55, 142.

with the Republic, with a large device (200-250lbs). The vehicles paused momentarily to observe the area at a point which, unbeknownst to them, was close to the concealed device. The PIRA, anticipating the vehicles would continue driving forwards, fired the bomb as soon as the lead vehicle began to move once again. However, because the driver had just put the Ferret scout car into reverse, the vehicle was actually moving away from the device, the explosion occurred 25 yards in front of the vehicle, and no one was harmed by the blast.⁷⁰⁴

Tragically for their security-force personnel targets, slightly mistimed explosions could still cause catastrophic injuries, or even death, as was the case for UDR Corporal Robert Moffett on 3 March 1974 at Dunamore.⁷⁰⁵ Moffett was a passenger in the second Landrover of a two-vehicle convoy that was returning soldiers who had been engaged in shooting practice at a range in Gortin to their base at Cookstown after. It is believed that the first Landrover in the convoy had been the intended targeted of the command-wire IED, that consisted of 200lb of explosives placed in a creamery can, which the PIRA had concealed in a culvert under the Cookstown to Omagh Road; but the device exploded just after the car had passed it. The IED may have failed to damage the leading vehicle, but the PIRA did succeed in inflicting injuries on four soldiers (that proved fatal, in the case of Moffett) who were all travelling in the second Landrover, indirectly, because it crashed into the large crater (12 ft wide and 3ft deep) that had been created by the blast.⁷⁰⁶ Still, it would be fair to say that these poorly timed attacks were not likely to produce civilian casualties, which would not have been the case in busy built up urban spaces.

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid., pp.144-145.

⁷⁰⁵ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, ref:1024.

⁷⁰⁶ 2 – 15 March 1974 in 'NIO Summary 1974-1975', TNA, CJ 4/1787.

While precision during the execution stage of a rural ambush attacks could make or break PIRA operations, it is also true that the outcome could also very much depend on actions taken at an earlier stage. A PIRA ambush would only succeed if the weapon and perpetrator were well concealed, and the PIRA were able to persevere with the sometimes lengthy and uncomfortable job of remaining in position at the firing point until an opportunity to target soldiers or police personnel arose. Poorly prepared or unmanned ambush sites could be discovered, and the PIRA's plans thwarted before they had placed their targets in level of danger. A command-wire IED was discovered and dismantled by the security forces on 6 September 1976 because the command-wire was spotted by soldiers on foot patrol.⁷⁰⁷ Had the device been better concealed, it is clear that it could have posed a potentially lethal threat to foot or vehicle patrol units in the area: 250lb of explosives had been placed in two milk churns, hidden in a culvert under the road between Warrenpoint and Newry, and connected to a firing point on the opposite side of the Newry River in the Republic of Ireland.

For the rural ambush campaign to continue to succeed the PIRA volunteers involved needed to avoid being caught, convicted, and sentenced to lengthy periods of incarceration for their crimes. Consequently, it was important to plan and prepare the escape vehicle and escape route, and avoid leaving behind potentially incriminating sources of forensic evidence that might indicate or prove a connection between them and the crime.

⁷⁰⁷ Barzilay, *Volume 3*, p.71.

It is clear that the PIRA involved in some of the aforementioned episodes had taken steps to do just this. The getaway vehicle used by the gunmen involved in the killing of Corporal Caddo at approximately 9:15 a.m. on 10 May 1973, was discovered at 10:30 a.m. that same day, abandoned and destroyed by fire a few miles down the road at Burns Bridge, by which time the gunmen were well away from the scene.⁷⁰⁸ But PIRA volunteers were less successful in making their escape from rural ambush attacks on other occasions when they failed to incorporate a sufficiently robust 'getaway' solution into their plan or were unable to easily hide in plain sight due to the lower volume of people and traffic in the area. The latter seems to have been the case for the PIRA volunteer who was eventually convicted in connection with the two-stage bombing attack at Narrow Water on 27 August 1979 which killed 18 soldiers. The fact that he and another volunteer were driving away at speed on a Suzuki 100 motorcycle without registration plates appeared sufficiently suspicious for the Gardaí to stop them just outside Omeath. The fact that the motor bike was then found to have a hollow compartment cut into the seat only added to the reasons why the Garda felt the men should be taken into custody where forensic evidence was collected which was later used as part of the prosecutions' case against them: both men and the bike were found to have traces of firearms residue and ammonium nitrate (an ingredient used in the explosive mix for the IEDs on this occasion).⁷⁰⁹

The fact that PIRA volunteers involved in firing the IEDs used in the Narrow Water massacre had left litter from the food, drink and cigarettes they consumed while they lay in wait

⁷⁰⁸ 10 May 1973, references: 5-8, TNA, WO3 05/4213; Head Quarters 3 Infantry Brigade Intelligence Summary 19/73, for the period 7 - 14 May 1973, TNA, WO 305/4213, pp.1, 18-19.

⁷⁰⁹ Harnden, *Bandit Country*, p. 204-205.

might not have been so problematic for them had they not been caught fleeing the scene – especially given the limitations of forensic science tests conducted at the time. The same could be said for the bomber who was shot whilst running away from the Tullyogallaghan ambush on 7 April 1973 whose conviction was also said to have been secured in part on the basis of forensic connections between him and items left at the firing point after the explosion: his fingerprints were found on one of the two lemonade bottles that was left along with some half-eaten sandwiches, and also found to match a print that was found on a car used in a separate shooting attack.⁷¹⁰

It is hard to say for sure that any incident of PIRA violence (including those outlined in this section) was wholly ‘discriminate’. Not least because the PIRA manufactured, stored and transported weapons through urban spaces. But, unless other evidence emerges to indicate that the PIRA’s actions would be better described as reckless or indiscriminate, it would be reasonable to suggest that the tactics adopted in these cases had an extremely low chance of incurring civilian casualties (collateral damage). The case studies presented in the following two sections will demonstrate that the risk to civilians was certainly lower than attacks conducted on the edge of urban spaces or within them.

Reckless Tactics I: Reduced Visibility

When PIRA operations are studied in detail it becomes quickly apparent that risk is posed to civilian safety as soon as there is any deviation from the formula described in the

⁷¹⁰ ‘Provos Admit Mine Murder’, *Belfast Newsletter*, 9 April 1973, p. 1; Morton, *Emergency Tour*, p. 10-11; McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 816-817.

discriminate-targeting protocols section. The times when the PIRA operated in rural environments, using manually fired weapons, but in conditions that provided them with poor visibility, are a good example of how this was the case. It should be noted that, one of the reasons for the caveats in the case studies discussed in the previous section is that it is not always possible to ascertain from the evidence whether the PIRA volunteers responsible for perpetrating the attacks could be well described as operating in conditions and from positions that gave the clear line of sight. There is little way of knowing if, or how often, the PIRA chose to hold their fire in a situation where their line of sight was obscured. By contrast, there is evidence to suggest that there were times when the PIRA were willing to operate in conditions of poor visibility conditions. The fact that the risk to civilian safety was raised in such situations is evident by the harm that arose as a consequence of the employment of this reckless tactic.

It would be fair to suggest that the PIRA volunteers who, late on the evening of 24 February 1979, decided to fire a command-wire IED which had been concealed at the side of a quiet country road which runs between Keady and Newtownhamilton (Co. Armagh), when darkness impaired their ability to see the road, had done so recklessly. The explosion occurred when a group of five teenagers were making their way home after attending a local dance, killing two and injuring three of them, although there seems little reason to believe that the teenagers had been target for which the bomb had been intended.⁷¹¹ The incident is described in security reports as being an example of the PIRA mistargeting

⁷¹¹ McKittrick, *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 2078-2079; 12 – 27 February 1979 in ‘NIO Summary 1977-1980’, TNA, CJ 4/3692.

civilians in place of security force personnel: 'It is thought that the five youths were mistaken for an army patrol.'⁷¹² The apology issued by the PIRA in the aftermath certainly promoted this line of argument: 'tragically the youths and their position on the road were mistaken for the movements of soldiers and the bomb was set off.'⁷¹³ It seems fair to accept this interpretation on the basis that there is no rational explanation of something that the PIRA could 'gain' from proactively targeting Catholic youths James Keenan and Martin McGuigan and their wider group of friends who were from this rural border town area. But what the attack does show, however, is that even when the PIRA used weapons that were manually fired, in rural spaces that could be reasonably expected to be unoccupied by civilians late at night, there was no guarantee that this was the case. Hence, PIRA tactics cannot be well described as discriminate if the perpetrators' vision was impaired.

Other times, it appears that civilian deaths were caused because distance and speed, as opposed to darkness, impaired the PIRA's ability to identify targets accurately. It is believed that the PIRA intended to target an unmarked military vehicle in which two plain clothes soldiers were travelling when they fired a 500lb command wired IED that was concealed at the side of the single carriageway that connects the villages of Lislea and Crossmaglen (Co. Armagh) at approximately 9.45 a.m. on 12 November 1980.⁷¹⁴ It seems that, from their position – the firing point was reportedly around 500 yards away from the explosion – the PIRA failed to notice that, moments before they detonated the device, the soldiers had

⁷¹² 12 – 27 February 1979 in 'NIO Summary 1977-1980', TNA, CJ 4/3692.

⁷¹³ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 2078.

⁷¹⁴ *Ibid.*, reference: 2272; 6 – 19 November 1980 in 'NIO Summary 1977-1980', TNA, CJ 4/3692; Harnden, *Bandit Country*, p.490.

pulled over to the side of the road to receive a radio transmission call, meaning that the car which was now speeding unwittingly towards their device, was that of a civilian, Mr Oliver Walsh, who had been on route to the factory in Crossmaglen where he worked. A later, but similar instance of misidentification occurred on 23 July 1988.⁷¹⁵ On this occasion the PIRA are believed to have intended to target a High Court judge, Eoin Higgins, with a 1000lb landmine near the village of Killeen (Co. Armagh) who was expected to be travelling with plain clothes RUC officers on the Belfast to Dublin Road. The device was detonated instead, when the PIRA mistook a different civilian vehicle for their target, killing Robert Hanna, his wife Maureen, and their seven-year-old son, David. Taken together, these incidents suggest that there was a potentially larger margin of error to be expected when the PIRA was attempting to target individuals who travelled in unmarked vehicles or wore civilian dress.

Occasionally there is oral testimony of former PIRA members on which we can draw to give an indication of what could and could not be seen when weapons were fired: generally, only when the PIRA member involved was convicted of the crime and went on to become disillusioned by the organisation at a later stage. Sean O'Callaghan claims in his memoir to have been the PIRA member who fired the mortars during a largescale attack on a remote UDR barracks that was housed in a Georgian building at the Deanery, outside the village of Clogher (Co. Tyrone), late on the evening of 2 May 1974. The assault also involved a RPG-7 rocket-launcher, a heavy machine gun (a belt-fed American Second World War heavy machine-gun) and a selection of small arms (mainly of American origin, ArmaLites, Garands,

⁷¹⁵ McKittrick, *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 2952, 2953, 2954.

and M1 carbines), and resulted in the death of UDR private Eva Martin. According to O'Callaghan, the plan had been for him to fire the mortars with the aid of a 'helper' who would be positioned closer to the target so that they could see whether the mortar rounds were landing on target and communicate this to him via WalkieTalkie radios so that he could adjust the aim of the mortar accordingly. However, O'Callaghan suggests that when the attack began, his helper was 'no where to be seen' and that he decided to proceed regardless:

I thought, "Fuck it", because I knew that without his advice I was firing blind.....I kept on firing the mortars, hoping that someone on the bank would come and give me directions if they saw that the mortars weren't hitting the base. I shouted several times but nothing could be heard above the noise of gunfire.⁷¹⁶

Sean O'Callaghan claims to have continued firing the mortar of his own volition may suggest that this was a fair account of his actions. However, they may also represent an attempt by the author to present a false narrative with the intention of smearing the representation of the organisation he later worked against (as an intelligence agent / informer against them). As such, should be treated with caution.

Finally, it is worth highlighting an example of an incident of PIRA violence that, on account of critically misreported details of the weapon involved, has sometimes been mischaracterised as an example of an operation that could plausibly fall inside this category. This is simply to highlight quite how significant each component of a PIRA tactic can be to our assessment of the degree of recklessness that was involved.

⁷¹⁶O'Callaghan, *The Informer*, pp.92-99.

On 10 December 1976, an (unnamed) part-time UDR Lieutenant and his wife were just driving out of their property in the village of Ballygawley (Co. Tyrone) when a bomb exploded, causing non-fatal injuries to them both. In some reports, the IED was detonated by radio-control.⁷¹⁷ If this was the case, then this is an example of an incident that could well have fallen inside this category of tactic. That is, if we were also able to find evidence to suggest that the PIRA had not intended to target the UDR man's wife but had instead simply been unable to see that she was inside the vehicle from their hiding spot, when they detonated the bomb. However, the evidence suggests that the device was actually a victim-operated IED and that this incident can only, therefore, be described as involving an indiscriminate tactic (more on those below). A brief summary of the incident recorded in the Northern Ireland Office Summary of Security Events for the period reports that the device was fired by a tripwire made up of a length of a fine thread that is normally used by medical surgeons (catgut suture): 'a 75lb land-mine triggered by catgut stretched across the drive of the home of a UDR lieutenant which injured him and his wife.'⁷¹⁸

Reckless Tactics II: The Rural/Urban Border

As soon as PIRA operations moved further into the urban sphere, there was an undeniable increase in the risks posed to civilian safety. Every operation that was conducted in the general vicinity of civilians – commercial or residential areas – had the potential to cause harm to non-combatants directly or indirectly. Civilians might be injured or killed by off-target and ricochet bullets, premature explosions and fires, or shrapnel, debris, and

⁷¹⁷ Wharton, *Wasted Years*, p.292.

⁷¹⁸ 1 – 14 December 1976 in 'NIO Summary 1974-1975', TNA, CJ 4/1787.

shattered glass. It would be fair to say that most PIRA operations that were executed within the proximity of civilians did not claim lives. But the volume of deaths and injuries inflicted upon the civilian community as a result of the PIRA's campaign of urban guerrilla warfare was still very much significant. This was not least because the PIRA lacked a convincing political mandate for applying violence; nor could they claim that any volume of collateral damage was justifiable. The number of civilians perceivably within range of a PIRA attack could vary tremendously from location to location. Attacks conducted in spaces which border the rural and urban landscape are the subject of this section and include anti-personnel attacks which took place at the edge of small rural villages, and attacks on military and police barracks that were at the edge of small villages and towns. The majority of the case studies discussed did not result in the injury or death of non-combatants, but the evidence indicates that there was some level of risk posed which, although highly unlikely to materialise, also cannot be denied.

It is important to note that to meet the *Reckless Tactics* criteria the cases that are discussed in the following section all involve weapons which are manually fired. Examples of times when the PIRA used victim-operated devices in similar locations are discussed in the *Indiscriminate Tactics* sections – and provide a good indication of how significantly these devices elevate the risk that posed to civilians.

In the *Discriminate Tactics* section, it was argued that the gunmen responsible for shooting Corporal Caddo in May 1973 were in a position to feel confident that the hail of bullets they

unleashed upon the part-time UDR man in an open field was unlikely to hit anyone other than the intended target, given that the environment was remote and rural. To some extent, the same might be said of the gunman who opened on Ulster Defence Regiment (8 UDR) Sergeant, Jack Eaglesham at around 9 a.m. on Tuesday 7 February 1978.⁷¹⁹ It seems reasonable to believe that the quiet country road on which this attack occurred experienced low levels of traffic, and that the general vicinity in which the PIRA were firing was free of civilians at the time of the attack.

The incident occurred on the Tullyodonnell Road, a single carriageway just outside of the small village of Rock (East Tyrone). A photograph of the crime scene that was taken shortly after the attack shows that it occurred at a point on the road which is bordered by open space on either side: a few trees and open grassland face perpendicular to the road on one side, while open fields back onto the other.⁷²⁰ From what we know of the dynamics of the attack, we might suggest that both the direction in which the PIRA planned to (and did) fire, and the direction which they might have expected the UDR man to return fire backed onto open space. However, this interpretation would ignore the prospective risk that bullets might at the very least ricochet in different directions – or, in the heat of the moment, be fired by either party in anything other than a straight line. For this reason, the tactic could only be considered to have involved a discriminate targeting protocol if the site of the attack was significantly distant from all civilian buildings, which is it clear was not the case. Rather,

⁷¹⁹ 'Dragnet for IRA Killers', *The Belfast Newsletter*, 8 February 1978, pp.1,3; February 1978 in 'NIO Summary 1977-1978', TNA, CJ 4/2297; 'I hope for peace but fear war', *The Belfast Newsletter*, 7 February 2018, <https://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/i-hope-for-peace-but-fear-war-1049690>, (20/02/2022), McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 1986.

⁷²⁰ Image captioned: 'The scene at Rock shortly after the murder. The school is just off the picture to the left. The firing point is just beyond the car on the right hand side of the road' in Barzilai, *Volume 3*, p.179.

the incident occurred at a point on the road that is between the Sacred Heart Rock Primary school and the graveyard of Sacred Heart Church (and only a short distance from either).

It seems reasonable to suggest that civilians (including children) could have been in and around the school or the graveyard that morning and might not been easily identifiable from the PIRA's position: the gunmen were said to have been hiding behind the low wall that borders the road, at a point where the road is slightly elevated and the banksides slope away steeply on either side. The fact that there is reason to suspect that the gunmen did not have a sufficiently clear line of sight to be certain of a discriminate outcome when they perpetrated the attack means that the tactic employed on this occasion must be categorised as reckless.

A common focus of PIRA violence was the military and police (or joint) bases and barracks. Mortars and rocket-launchers were commonly used to attack these buildings, often supported by further fire from small arms and machine-guns.⁷²¹ Sometimes the sites that the PIRA targeted were located on the edge of rural villages and towns, or positioned close to the border with the Republic of Ireland. This allowed the PIRA to coordinate the movement of people and weapons employed in an assault, or even launch the attack from a position that was outside the jurisdiction of those they were targeting.⁷²²

⁷²¹ Gary A. Ackerman, 'The Provisional Irish Republican Army and the Development of Mortars', *Journal of Strategic Security*, 9:1, (2016), pp.12-24.

⁷²² Adams, Morgan and Bambridge, *Ambush*, p.71.

The risk posed to civilian safety was raised if attacks were launched against military bases located near residential or commercial property. Some of the targets in question backed onto open, rural space on one or more sides of the building: the PIRA could lower the intensity of risk their assault posed to civilians by firing in that direction. The joint RUC/military base at Crossmaglen was attacked by the PIRA on several occasions.

Contemporary aerial photographs and maps of the site show that the base was on the edge of the village, backed onto open rural space, but was still near residential and commercial properties.⁷²³ Even then, it would be fair to say that any mistakes on the part of the PIRA could have led to bombs and bullets being misdirected towards civilian homes. Indeed, PIRA mortar attacks launched at stations like Crossmaglen were sometimes launched from firing positions that were in amongst residential or commercial properties. There was a greater degree of risk of collateral damage occurring in such scenarios.

The mortar attack on Crossmaglen station that was launched by the PIRA on 30 August 1976 was fired from an enclosed courtyard positioned 80 meters away from Crossmaglen RUC station.⁷²⁴ David Barzilay emphasised that from this position, the PIRA were able to see the rooftop of the station but were themselves out of sight from any Sanger position on the base, when captioning a photograph of the ten-barrel mortar device that was taken in situ after the attack.⁷²⁵ It is also clear that the courtyard was amongst the public buildings that line the village square and, therefore, posed some level of threat to civilians in the general vicinity.

⁷²³ Morton, *Emergency Tour*, pp.29,59.

⁷²⁴ Patrick, *Fetch Felix*, pp. 60-61.

⁷²⁵ Barzilay, *Volume 3*, p.75.

Attacks on rural security bases rarely resulted in caused civilian casualties, but the tactics demonstrate that the PIRA was willing to compromise civilian safety when launching their campaign of assaults against military barracks. The PIRA cannot be said to have been as willing to make compromises on their other objectives, by comparison. Although, the fact that these attacks rarely resulted in military casualties, and some PIRA volunteers did lose their lives in the process means that they were invariably unable to succeed in this regard.

Police and military stations and barracks were increasingly fortified against PIRA attacks over time: sandbags, reinforced glass and chain nets were among the features that were increasingly added to reduce the likelihood of weapons being able to penetrate the buildings. For this reason, the PIRA's assaults could sometimes fail to cause serious material damage, yet alone military casualties, if or when the PIRA's weapons were insufficiently powerful or malfunctioned when fired.

Most rocket and mortar attacks that the PIRA launched in the 1970s failed to claim lives. Some of the earlier attacks even failed to generate substantial material damage even though the PIRA had fired a significant volley of bullets and bombs. The PIRA is said to have fired 30-35 mortar bombs in addition to 400 small arms rounds at a vehicle checkpoint on the outskirts of Strabane, from their position in Lifford on 22 February 1974; little damage was said to have been caused, however, due to the fact that 12 mortar failed to explode and all mortars rounds fell short of the security forces' position.⁷²⁶

⁷²⁶ 16 February - 1 March 1974 in 'NIO Summary 1974-1975', TNA, CJ 4/1787; Deutsch and Magowan, *Volume 3*, p.20.

This is not to say that misfired or malfunctioning mortar bombs did not pose a danger to security force personnel. On the contrary, there are incidents when deaths or injuries were inflicted by mortar rounds that had been fired at military buildings but failed (initially) to explode. For it was the security forces rather than the PIRA who worked to disarm, dismantle, and dispose of PIRA IEDs whether they were in a live, partially detonated or dud state. The fact that bomb-disposal was an inherently dangerous task on all occasions is demonstrated well by the circumstances in which a bomb-disposal expert lost his life on 5 December 1972.⁷²⁷ The PIRA had launched a mortar attack on an Army base at Kitchen Hill in Lurgan at approximately 18:10 p.m. that day using the latest version of their home-made mortar device (PIRA mortar Mark 2) for the first time. The PIRA are said to have fired two (or three – according to some sources) mortar rounds at the base with little success: none of the rounds hit the base, most exploding instead prematurely, a few feet from the base plate. The second (or third) round failed to fire because it had become caught inside the mortar tube by its fins where it remained suspended, facing downwards towards the ground. The mortar round was still very much live and dangerous, however when ATO Sergeant Roy Hills was tasked with making the device safe. Former ATO, Steve Smith records the tragic outcome of the incident in his memoir:

He went forward to tackle the unexploded device, which meant first removing it entirely from its tube. At some stage, he appears to have made an error – the indications are that, with fingers chilled by the cold of the winter's evening, he may have simply mishandled the bomb and dropped it. It detonated killing him instantly.⁷²⁸

⁷²⁷ Smith, *3-2-1 Bomb Gone*, pp. 85-87, 133-134; *Fortnight*, No. 52 (Dec. 15, 1972), pp. 12-13; McKittrick, *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 695.

⁷²⁸ Smith, *3-2-1 Bomb Gone*, p.86.

On other occasions unstable weapons were the root cause of PIRA fatalities. The PIRA attack on Pomeroy RUC station on 16 August 1973 ultimately caused them more harm than it did the police officers they were targeting.⁷²⁹ Multiple PIRA volunteers positioned themselves in three different spots around the station to launch the attack: some were 200m west of the station with an RPG7 rocket launcher, others were 200m east of the station with a multiple-tube homemade mortar device that was loaded onto the back of a green Bedford truck, and the rest are thought to have maintained a central command look-out point 100m north of the station. In total it is thought that the PIRA fired up to four rockets, seven mortar rounds, and 30-40 small firearms rounds at the station. Only two of the mortars hit the station; little damage and no casualties were caused. Two PIRA volunteers were killed during the attack, however, when a mortar bomb backfired. Other (surviving) members of the PIRA bombing team are said to have driven the truck-mounted mortar away from the scene and abandoned the bodies of their deceased comrades on the side of the road between Dungannon and Ballygawley, before dumping the vehicle at a quarry at Ballynahaye. It would seem that they did so in a somewhat rushed (or traumatised) state for a significant number of weapons and other evidence remained in the vehicle including the WalkieTalkie radios they had been using to communicate across the locations, a US army pattern pistol (.45mm automatic) with seven rounds remaining in the magazine, and several unexploded mortar bombs (between 16 and 25 according to different reports).

⁷²⁹ 16 – 17 August 1973, 'HQ3 Diary, August 73', TNA, WO 305/4216; 11 – 17 August 1973 in 'NIO Summary 1973', TNA, CJ 4/1024; McKittrick, *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 920-921; Barzilay, *Volume 2*, p.11.

The fact that malfunctioning mortars was a phenomenon that was primarily, but not exclusively, restricted to the earlier years of the armed struggle is evident by the fact that another PIRA volunteer, Seamus Woods, lost his life because of a premature mortar explosion in an attack on the very same station on 7 July 1988.⁷³⁰ Mortar-related fatalities, PIRA or otherwise, are nevertheless something of a rare occurrence across the entire conflict.

At other times the PIRA succeeded in damaging police or military property to the extent that security force personnel were injured by crumbling buildings or falling debris. It is reported that on Saturday 11 August 1973 the PIRA mounted a 'determined attack' on the RUC station at Crossmaglen (Co. Armagh) that lasted approximately twenty minutes. In total the PIRA are said to have fired 500-600 small arms rounds, seven rockets – five of which exploded against the protective screens while two succeeded to hit the main building – and seventeen mortar bombs – fifteen of which landed inside of the compound. Consequently, two buildings were reportedly 'wrecked', and seven members of the security force staff were injured.⁷³¹

Security force fatalities did sometimes result from the PIRA attacks on police and military stations earlier in the campaign when PIRA rockets and mortars proceeded to hit a weak point in the building. An example occurred on 28 November 1972 and involved heavy artillery fire and an RPG-7 rocket launcher which was then an extremely recent addition to

⁷³⁰ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 2950.

⁷³¹ 11 – 17 August 1973 in 'NIO Summary 1973', TNA, CJ 4/1024.

the PIRA's arsenal.⁷³² On this day the PIRA initiated a sustained attack on Belleek RUC station that was said to have lasted approximately twenty minutes in total. Sergeant Robert Keys was killed during the attack as he walked passed a window which despite having been fitted with ¾-inch armour plating, failed to prevent one of the RPG-7 rockets from passing through. It is unclear whether the PIRA rocket struck the window intentionally or by chance. It is clear, however that the incident is the exception and not the rule. The attack was the first in a series of ten rocket-launcher attacks conducted by the PIRA that day, and the only incident in which a life was lost. In total, 15 rockets were fired at 10 different targets across Northern Ireland including police stations and military barracks and military vehicles. One or two rockets were fired at each target, alongside a volley or more sustained period of gunfire. In addition to taking the life of Sergeant Keys, the rocket attacks caused 'structural damage, mainly of a minor nature' and injuries to seven soldiers in two separate incidents.

The PIRA succeeded in inflicting casualties on those within fortified buildings on other occasions by simply increasing the payload of the mortars they fired. The PIRA's Mark 8 mortar attack on the joint RUC/military barracks in August 1976 (mentioned previously in part II), failed to cause significant material damage due to the defensive measures in place at the barracks. More damage was inflicted on the base, however, a few months later when the PIRA debuted what became known as the Mark 9 mortar.⁷³³ The Mark 9 rounds that were fired at the base on 23 October 1976 each held 10-12lbs of explosives. The Mark 8 rounds which were fired the previous summer were much smaller by comparison, holding

⁷³² 'Northern Ireland (Rocket Attacks) House of Commons Debate', 29 November 1972, Hansard, vol. 847 cc. 419-424, <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1972/nov/29/northern-ireland-rocket-attacks>, (01/03/2022); McKittrick, *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 682.

⁷³³ Patrick, *Fetch Felix*, pp.60-61; 20 October - 3 November 1976 in 'NIO Summary 1974-1975', TNA, CJ 4/1787; Smith, *3-2-1 Bomb Gone*, p.137; Barzilay, *Volume 3*, pp.76-77.

an estimated maximum of 5lbs per round. The heavier payload of the ten Mark 9 rounds fired at the based caused significantly more material damage than had been possible previously: all ten rounds exploded, seven after they had first penetrated the building.⁷³⁴ No fatalities resulted from the attack, but the fortnightly summary of events in the period records that six soldiers were 'slightly injured' in the assault. It may be the case that at least one of these soldiers was, however, more than slightly injured for, Lieutenant Colonel Patrick's account of the event recorded that one man lost his hand.⁷³⁵

Reckless Tactics III: 'Out-of-Hours' Urban Operations

The PIRA conducted a large programme of what they would refer to as economic warfare or sabotage operations which involved causing material damage to shops, transport, or other key elements of the infrastructure in the region. The risk that PIRA operations posed to civilian safety is heightened as soon as the targets move close to the civilian population. But commercial or industrial centres can be a live and changing environment: some spaces ebb and flow with people, others are more permanently occupied or have set patterns in which civilians are expected to be present. The PIRA accordingly took the opportunity on some occasions to target commercial properties out-of-hours (for instance, they planted bombs that were designed to explode in shops and restaurants long after they closed). They also perpetrated sniper attacks on soldiers who were engaged in late night guard duties or foot patrols. By doing so the PIRA reduced the chances that their operations would cause harm to civilians.

⁷³⁴ Smith, *3-2-1 Bomb Gone*, p.137.

⁷³⁵ Patrick, *Fetch Felix*, pp. 60-61.

There were many ways in which out-of-hours operations could and did result in outcomes that the PIRA would not have desired, nevertheless. For example, even though late-night snipers could select an elevated vantage point and use a telescopic sight to check that the area into which they were firing was clear from civilians – the fact that the rifles and ammunition commonly used by PIRA snipers were sufficiently powerful to penetrate walls or vehicles meant that firing them within the general proximity of urban and residential properties was reckless.

Sometimes the PIRA lured security force personnel to the location where they planned to attack them. The soldiers ambushed at a disused match factory on the Donegall Road on the evening of 13 May 1973 had gone to investigate an anonymous report of suspicious activity.⁷³⁶ The PIRA manually fired an IED inflicting serious injuries upon four soldiers, two of whom died of their injuries subsequently.

The weapon that had been used during the attack at the disused match factory in May 1973 was fired by command-pull: a technique whereby the perpetrator pulls a line that is connected to one end of the switch to remove the insulator and fire the bomb manually, rather than setting up a line as a tripwire to be triggered by the victim.⁷³⁷ This tactic was not often employed by the PIRA, which is perhaps why the incident is often reported to have involved a ‘booby-trap’ bomb, which is a little misleading.⁷³⁸ The tactic was certainly

⁷³⁶ 11 - 17 May 1973 in ‘NIO Summary 1973’, TNA, CJ 4/1024; McKittrick et al., *Lost Lives*, references 838, 841.

⁷³⁷ The device consisted of a simple tin-tac/clothes peg design and is described in Cochrane, ‘The development’, p.93.

⁷³⁸ McKittrick et al., *Lost Lives*, reference: 838.

more discriminate than had the PIRA planted a tripwire device. But the fact that the PIRA mistook civilians for the police or soldiers they had intended to lure into their ambush attacks at similar locations suggests that the risk of error was heightened regardless.

It is thought that the PIRA ransacked a post office at Silverbridge (Co. Armagh) on 24 March 1975 in a bid to lure security force personnel into an ambush attack. As it happened, it was William Elliot, local postmaster for the Newry area who first came to investigate the premises with a colleague. The RUC later said that the PIRA gunmen who fired around 30 shots at the two men as they were heading back towards their vehicle had 'most probably' mistaken the men for detectives.⁷³⁹

The PIRA were less able to control the outcome of their out-of-hour attacks on commercial premises when they planted time-operated IEDs and incendiaries. They could reduce the likelihood that civilian casualties would occur by selecting targets that were not close to residential properties and did not employ out-of-hours security staff. The PIRA was able to plant three incendiary devices inside of a new COOP supermarket on York Street in Belfast on 20 January 1977 that had been due to open the following week, which fired overnight causing serious smoke and water damage to the property.⁷⁴⁰

⁷³⁹ Ibid., reference: 1334; 13 March – 26 March 1975 in 'NIO Summary 1974-1975', TNA, CJ 4/1787.

⁷⁴⁰ *Fortnight*, No. 142 (Feb. 18, 1977), p.10.

It is unclear whether those who decided to plant incendiary devices in John Frazer's department store on Castle Street in Belfast on the evening of 21 January 1977 knew that the shop employed security staff outside opening hours.⁷⁴¹ The fire was said to have come to the attention of a police patrol at approximate 1 a.m. which was well after the shop would have closed. Security guard James McColgan was, however, on the premises at the time and was found to have died in the fire, after having succumbed to the flames.⁷⁴² McColgan's death was at the very least the result of a recklessly insufficient level of attention having been given to the dynamics of the target that was selected by the PIRA, and at worst a consciously indiscriminate targeting protocol. The fact that the PIRA do not seem to have claimed responsibility for the blast perhaps suggests that the former was more likely the case on this occasion.

There is evidence to suggest that the PIRA did not always proceed with the late-night ambush attacks they had planned and prepared. The late-night ambush that was planned for 23 February 1985 at Fountain Street in Strabane (West Tyrone) but was ultimately abandoned is described in detail in the court records pertaining to the appeal of one of the would-be participants. The prosecution said:

The conspiracy here was the nearest possible thing to a very ruthless multiple killing. Five men of the security forces were the intended victims, sophisticated deadly weapons consisting of three rifles and two grenade launchers were to be employed, there was a thought-out plan, in the sense that fire was to be opened with the grenade launchers and then the murder squad were to shoot the occupants of the vehicle when they got out. Not only that, but everything was laid on the ground. The

⁷⁴¹ 12-26 January 1977 in 'NIO Summary 1974-1975', TNA, CJ 4/1787; *Fortnight*, No. 142 (Feb. 18, 1977), p.10; McKittrick *et al*, *Lost Lives*, references: 1873.

⁷⁴² 'Firebomb "killed security man"', *Belfast Telegraph*, 21 January 1977, p.1.

murder squad was assembled. They even waited till 3.00 a.m. and only dispersed when it was decided that it would not be practical to carry out the attack.⁷⁴³

Civilians would be less likely to pass by the scene of this potential ambush in the small hours of the morning. Still, the fact that the plan had been to use high-powered weapons on a street that is lined with residential properties was certainly deemed by the appeals court to be an act that would pose a serious risk to those in the surrounding area, and the appellants appeal claim was ultimately dismissed:

The crimes pose a grave danger to the whole community, the perpetrators are difficult to bring to justice and the crimes in themselves are very wicked crimes, meriting severely deterrent and exemplary punishment. Accordingly, the sentences of twenty years and fifteen years imposed were graded in proportion and were not manifestly excessive or wrong in principle.⁷⁴⁴

Reckless Tactics IV: Operating in the Presence of Civilians

The PIRA often operated in urban environments when civilians were present. The reasons they chose to do so include opportunity, convenience, and self-preservation. High numbers of soldiers and police officers could be found in public spaces engaged in patrolling or guard duties, responding to live security-related incidents, or investigating crimes already committed. Off-duty RUC and British army personnel, and the civilians that the PIRA targeted for alleged engagement in 'collaboration' could be found in public spaces such as in and outside shops, restaurants, and bars, in private homes or personal vehicles.

⁷⁴³ R v Crossan, *Northern Ireland Law Reports*, (1987), NI 355.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid., R v Crossan, *Court of Appeal*, (1987), 2 NIJB 72.

The PIRA would be incentivised to perpetrate violence in these urban environments for the military advantages of being able to hide themselves and their weapons in plain sight: this increased the likelihood of their taking lives when achieving the element of surprise; and their objective of fleeing the scene without being captured or killed themselves. The locations were generally of greater convenience to the PIRA – for the simple reason that they were close to home; so, they did not have to transport themselves or weapons very far and avoided the associated risks of doing so.

The PIRA chose to perpetrate violence in these spaces because their targets were easier to harm and less likely to pose danger to them in return. Off-duty security force personnel could still be armed, but were less likely to be wearing protective clothing, and more likely to be caught off-guard and unaware. Civilian targets were naturally the most defenceless to the prospect of a PIRA attack.

The PIRA also chose to perpetrate violence in the presence of civilians because they expected their presence to deter security force personnel from returning fire; a controversial practice known as using a 'human-shield'.⁷⁴⁵ The argument is that it was potentially less likely that they would face return fire in the urban sphere if the security forces needed to use restraint to protect civilian safety. Accusations regarding the use of human shields go both ways: both the army and the PIRA accused one another of adopting the practice at various points. For example, the gunmen who carried out an attack on the

⁷⁴⁵ Gross, *The Ethics*, pp.127-150.

Coldstream Guards on 24 December 1972, are alleged to have ‘used a crowd of around 50 children as cover and soldiers did not return fire’.⁷⁴⁶ Seán Mac Stiofáin meanwhile accused the army of adopting the practice on a night time raid of a ‘no-go’ area in the Bogside (Derry) on the evening of 14 March 1972:

The Brits had left snipers behind at the council flats when they withdrew, knowing that the IRA could not return fire on their positions without endangering the occupants.⁷⁴⁷

Finding evidence to confirm whether this was an official policy either way, would be challenging. But there are some examples of those involved having suggested that this was the case. A former soldier who patrolled Andersonstown and Lenadoon (West Belfast) interviewed by Ken Wharton said:

If you stopped any time, you stopped adjacent to a door or window, because the Provos don’t like shooting at you if there was a prospect of hitting their own; they preferred you out in the open or against a plain wall. If people were nearby, we stood close to them, so they acted as a human shield. It may seem callous to use civilians as protection, but it was a battle of wits and using any means possible to outwit the gunman or sniper.⁷⁴⁸

And it would seem that civilians felt that this could be the case on other occasions. Local residents complained that the army checkpoint on the Culmore Road in Derry was intentionally positioned so that they could be used as human shields to ward off attacks. The fact that the houses were close by does not seem to have deterred the PIRA, however, as the checkpoint was attacked, for instance with a 100lb bomb that was planted inside the

⁷⁴⁶ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 720.

⁷⁴⁷ Mac Stiofáin, *Memoirs*, p.237.

⁷⁴⁸ Ken Wharton, *Bloody Belfast: An Oral History of the British Army’s War Against the IRA*, (Port Stroud, Gloucestershire, 2010), pp.55-57 cited in White, *Out of the Ashes* p.7.

compound on 23 July 1993 – although, the proximity of the residents may have informed their decision to give several hours advance warning on this occasion.⁷⁴⁹

There have been examples in other conflicts where civilians have consented to serve as shields to protect others against fire for this very purpose. A description of a shooting ambush on police at the junction of Irish Street and Ogle Street in Armagh on 7 April 1973 indicates that there may have been some conscious cooperation in this regard:

As the shooting started women rushed into the area from behind the gunmen and cars began to drive up and down Navan St. The patrol commander ordered the patrol not to return fire and the gunmen withdrew.⁷⁵⁰

Most accusations regarding human shields refer to incidents when civilians were not willing participants to the process. Ethicists make clear that this is not a tactic that falls within scope of the just war theory: ‘the use of involuntary shields such as POWs or enemy civilians to protect targets....is rightly proscribed regardless of the context.’⁷⁵¹

The PIRA chose to sacrifice the safety of others in all cases where civilians were in the general vicinity; but the degree of risk could vary depending on whether any warning was issued, the type of weapon used, skill with which it was fired, and the actions or reactions of others. With the exception of shotguns (which fire shot and are, therefore, less discriminate), firearms gave the PIRA most control and therefore scope to avoid civilian

⁷⁴⁹ ‘SF, Church Talks Go On’, *Irish Independent*, 10 July 1992, p.11.

⁷⁵⁰ Head Quarters 3 Infantry Brigade Intelligence Summary 14/73, For the Period 2 April - 9 April 1973, p.14

⁷⁵¹ David Whetham, ‘Response to Michael Gross: Human Shields, Participatory Liability, and Different Sets of Rules’, *Journal of Military Ethics*, 14/ 3–4, (2015), pp.255–259; Gross, *The Ethics*, p.129.

casualties arising when firing in the urban sphere. This is because they are manually fired and have the capacity to achieve acutely precise and discriminate targeting; that is, to hit a small target from far away, without harming those/things around them. There are examples when the PIRA fired on soldiers and police in outdoor urban environments when civilians were in the general vicinity. When the shooting was accurate, they did not injure or kill non-targets. Still, danger is posed to civilians in the vicinity of a firearms attack that is perpetrated with weapons that have sufficient power to fire bullets through walls (or people). But the most serious and common danger was off target shooting and misfired weapons.

There were fewer obstacles to consider when the operation involved attacking the target outside their property, but civilians might be in or outside this and other nearby properties and so the PIRA would need to fire the weapon with accuracy to ensure that non-targets were not injured or killed in the process. One such example when they succeeded occurred on 10 October 1972 when the PIRA shot and killed colour sergeant John Ruddy (UDR) just outside his home in Drumalane Park in Newry (Co. Armagh) as he was leaving for work.⁷⁵² That morning, Ruddy had exited the property and was just turning around to wave at his wife when he was shot and killed. Mrs Ruddy – who witnessed the incident from the back door of the property – recalled first hearing two gunshots, followed by a burst of gunfire.

⁷⁵² McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 635; 'Coroner's Inquest relating to the death of John Ruddy', 15 June 1973, PRONI, ARM/6/1/1/26/29A.

The risk to civilians in the vicinity of the PIRA's attacks on moving vehicles in urban spaces was higher when the weapons involved had a greater capacity for violent destruction; a factor most likely when the PIRA targeted the armoured vehicles used by the army and police. It was reported in the NIO summary of security events for the period 6 – 13 April 1973 that two civilians were injured in the Lower Falls area of West Belfast when the PIRA fired a rocket at a Saracen armoured vehicle. The report notes the incident to be one of many in the week that represented 'the [P]IRA's total lack of concern for the safety of civilians, including Catholics'.⁷⁵³

It was more challenging for the PIRA to fire accurately and discriminate between targets and non-targets if either they or their target was on the move. The 'drive-by' was a tactic used to attack both people and properties (and the people inside the properties) with guns and IEDs. The PIRA was willing to perpetrate drive-by shooting and bombing attacks, to increase their chances of safe escape from the scene of the crime and minimise the possibility that they would be killed by return fire in the process. But the tactic was inherently dangerous to civilians in the general vicinity of the attack who could be harmed by misdirected gunfire, ricochet bullets or the effects of hand-thrown grenades.

The urban drive-by shooting attacks the PIRA perpetrated did sometimes result in only the casualties they had intended to cause. A case in point occurred around midday on 5 June 1973 when the PIRA fired 25 shots from a Thompson submachinegun at a two-person RUC

⁷⁵³ 6 - 12 April 1973 in 'NIO Summary 1973', TNA, CJ 4/1024.

foot patrol from a moving vehicle, as the constables were passing down a narrow street close to the war memorial and East Bridge in Enniskillen.⁷⁵⁴ One of the two RUC officers did not survive the attack. Constable David Purvis died in a helicopter on the way to hospital. Although no one else was injured during the shooting attack, it is clear that the tactic posed a heightened degree of risk to civilians because it occurred at lunchtime in the vicinity of shops, restaurants and at least one residential property – the home of a local doctor who came the aid of the injured police officers – was struck by stray bullets.⁷⁵⁵ Similarly, no one else was injured when the PIRA killed RUC Reserve Constable Jacob Rankin in a drive-by shooting attack in Tyrone on the morning of 4 July 1978.⁷⁵⁶ The full-time reservist was working and in uniform that day but was walking alone at the time he was killed because it was his morning break and he had decided to pop out to the shops purchase cigarettes and biscuits.

The PIRA sometimes used a combination of weapons in their drive-by attacks. It is reported that the gunmen involved in perpetrating the drive-by attack on the UDR headquarters in Belfast in 1979 also threw two hand grenade devices (or small IEDs).⁷⁵⁷ Grenades pose a potentially greater risk to non-combatants in the vicinity of an urban PIRA drive-by attack, for they are lobbed somewhat crudely and cause devastation to a relatively wider area than a bullet. No civilians were maimed or killed by grenades on this occasion: one failed to explode and the other only succeeded in damaging the security fence. But the whole attack, which

⁷⁵⁴ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 867.

⁷⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, reference: 867.

⁷⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, reference: 2037

⁷⁵⁷ June 1979 in 'NIO Summary 1978-1979', TNA, CJ 4/2915; 30 May – 12 June 1979 in 'NIO Summary 1977-1980', TNA, CJ 4/3692.

occurred at around 11.15 a.m. in a residential part of West Belfast, claimed the life of one UDR soldier, and caused injuries to two of his colleagues, undeniably posed a risk to those in the surrounding area.⁷⁵⁸

At other times the PIRA seemed to be willing to open fire in scenarios where it is clear civilians were at serious risk of being harmed in the process, or only narrowly escaped harm.⁷⁵⁹ A PIRA gunman riding as the pillion passenger on a stolen motorbike shot and killed magistrate William J. Staunton at around 8.45 a.m. on 11 October 1972 in the driver's seat of his car moments after he had pulled over to drop his daughter and her school friends off at St Dominic's school on the Falls Road in West Belfast. The fact that both vehicles had come to a stop prior to the attack may have increased the chances that the gunman could fire accurately. Equally, the close-range position from which the assault was perpetrated would indicate that the gunman would have had a clear sense of whether others were in or around the vehicle at the time (i.e., the prospective risk that collateral damage would be caused). Assuming this was the case they would have noticed that while most of the children had exited the car before they opened fire at the driver's window, one of the magistrate's daughters was still in the back seat of the car. The child was not reported to have been injured by either the gunfire or subsequent car crash that occurred, but her father died of his injuries several weeks later on 25 January 1973.

⁷⁵⁸ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 2113.

⁷⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, reference: 739.

On other occasions the reckless protocol of firing out of a moving vehicle resulted in the PIRA killing nearby civilians instead or as well as their intended target. On 4 February 1978 the PIRA used a van which they had stolen via a prior hijacking incident to conduct a drive-by shooting attack directed towards an RUC constable who was on traffic duty outside of a football match at the Crusaders' Football ground (off the Shore Road in North Belfast).⁷⁶⁰ The constable was reported to have been 'seriously injured' but survived the attack, in which the PIRA are said to have fired 'a number of rounds' – as many as 6 high velocity shots, according to some accounts. The football ground is situated nearby residential properties, shops and restaurants and can be heavily populated with supporters on the day of a football match. On the day of the shooting Martha McAlpine (69) had been standing nearby; she was struck by a stray bullet and died almost immediately at the scene.⁷⁶¹ On this occasion the PIRA issued a statement to address the consequences of their off-target (and highly reckless) attack. The statement is said to have referred to Mrs McAlpine as having died 'tragically', and offered the organisations 'sincere condolences', before repeating a commonly issued warning to the general public that, at least on some level, could be read as an attempt to diminish their own responsibility for the local ladies death: 'it is not our intention to hurt or injure innocent civilians, but we again warn the public to stay clear of British troops, UDR and RUC personnel.'⁷⁶²

⁷⁶⁰ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 1985.

⁷⁶¹ 25 January – 8 February 1978 in 'NIO Summary 1977-1980', TNA, CJ 4/3692; February 1978 in 'NIO Summary 1977-1978', TNA, CJ 4/2297.

⁷⁶² McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 1985.

Reckless Tactics V: Operations that Depend on the Actions of Others

PIRA tactics could involve a greater risk of deviation from what the PIRA had planned or expected to occur if or when the tactic relied upon the actions or reactions of others to succeed. This is because the PIRA was not always able to elicit compliance with their demands through force or predict the manner in which civilians would respond to their instructions.

PIRA operations sometimes relied upon the assumption that volunteers, armed with one or more firearms, could elicit compliance from civilians in order to succeed. Examples of this include cases when they perpetrated the armed hi-jacking of vehicles, armed robbery, or held civilian's hostage in their homes or places of employment, at gunpoint. The PIRA used all of these tactics on a regular basis to acquire resources (funds and vehicles), or the opportunity to seek cover or concealment from their target.

The PIRA are regularly reported to have 'taken-over' a residential property – i.e., taken the residents hostage – to gain a suitably concealed vantage point from which to shoot at an unsuspecting target. There are cases where the PIRA held civilians under threat of fire, for hours or days at a time; the experience was non-trivial for those unfortunate enough to be taken hostage, for any length of time. A case in point occurred on 2 August 1979. The PIRA

lured the RUC to Clondara Street in West Belfast with a hoax call regarding a burglary.⁷⁶³

When the RUC constables arrived at the property with the alleged break in, the PIRA opened fire on them from the upstairs window of a house opposite – which they had taken control of by holding the resident's hostage.⁷⁶⁴ Constable Derek Davidson was killed instantly. Another detective incurred a non-fatal graze to the hip after five separate bullets tore through their clothing while they dived to the ground for safety. Of course, taking and controlling hostages was not the only risky component of the PIRA's shooting attacks that took place in an urban environment; firing weapons into residential streets is inherently dangerous, even if those you take hostage in the process comply with your demands. Indeed, there were occasions when this risk materialised as casualties in the local community.

A civilian casualty resulted when the PIRA recycled this tactic on the morning of 9 December 1980.⁷⁶⁵ This time, the RUC detectives were lured to the desired location – St Colman's Drive on the (mainly Catholic) Ballycolman estate in Strabane – with a hoax report that a gas meter had been broken into. Mrs Heather Joan Pollock (53) lived in the adjacent property with her husband. They had been sitting together in the kitchen when PIRA gunmen opened fire from the property directly opposite, which they had taken over by force. Mr and Mrs Pollock lay on the floor instinctively when they heard gunfire, yet Mrs Pollock was struck by

⁷⁶³ The call is said to have been placed by a female and was traced (before the RUC went to investigate the scene) as having been made from a local shop according to the authors of McKittrick et al., *Lost Lives*, reference: 2129.

⁷⁶⁴ McKittrick et al., *Lost Lives*, reference: 2129.

⁷⁶⁵ McKittrick et al., *Lost Lives*, reference: 2278.

a stray bullet that spinal cord; a fatal injury to which she would succumb some weeks later (27 December 1980).

It is also clearly apparent that such experiences were traumatic, if non-lethal for those involved.⁷⁶⁶ An RUC spokesman was quoted as having said that the two families – including six children – held hostage by the PIRA in order to fire at a police checkpoint in Belfast on 20 December 1993 had suffered a ‘terrifying ordeal’. The statement continued:

These young children were terrified and will remember this incident for the rest of their lives. It is disgrace children are being used in this way. Some adults may confront terrorists trying to take over their homes, but that is very unlikely if they have young children because they will put their safety first.⁷⁶⁷

On other occasions, the PIRA held resident’s hostage in their own homes for the purpose of conducting interrogations or executions in the space, as was the case on 16 March 1973. ‘This is the IRA – we are taking over the house’ declared one of the four PIRA volunteers that burst into the home of a married couple on Edlingham Street off the New Lodge Road in North Belfast, who were in the property at the time.⁷⁶⁸ The gunmen occupied the house until the late afternoon to interrogate a UDR Private, William Larmour Kenny, who they had hijacked and abducted at gunpoint on Halliday’s Road earlier that day. A short while after the PIRA had left the property Kenny’s body was discovered a short distance away from the property, where he had been left by his captors with fatal gunshot wounds to the head.

⁷⁶⁶ See G C Loughrey, P Bell, M Kee, R J Roddy and P S Curran, ‘Post-traumatic stress disorder and civil violence in Northern Ireland’, *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 153 (1988), pp. 554-560.

⁷⁶⁷ ‘RUC blast Provos for “human shield” tactic’, *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 22 July 1993, p.16.

⁷⁶⁸ 16 – 22nd March 1973 in ‘NIO Summary 1973’, TNA, CJ 4/1024; McKittrick et al., *Lost Lives*, reference: 800.

Not all the victims of PIRA assassination attacks were targeted at a time or place when they were likely to be alone. To the contrary, the PIRA shot many of their victims in places that they knew ahead of time would be full of people who they would have to control in order to carry out the assassination they had planned. Former PIRA member Gerry Bradley explained that the PIRA's standard procure in such scenarios was to move those other than the target into another room so that they didn't come into any harm and knew as little as possible.⁷⁶⁹ However, there are countless examples when this was absolutely not the case.

There were several other people in the home of UDR Private Denis Wilson when gunmen arrived with the intention of assassinating him on 1 December 1971.⁷⁷⁰ It was approximately 10.30 p.m. when three PIRA volunteers, armed with two pistols and a submachine gun respectively, burst into the family property (a farmhouse at Curlough, near Caledon in Co. Tyrone). The gunmen are said to have forced their way into the property after the door had been opened to them by another UDR soldier who was also at the property at the time, pushing him and Private Wilson's parents aside in their frantic search for him. Other members of the family, who had been upstairs when the gunmen arrived were held there while the UDR-man was shot where he sat in the front room of his home. The PIRA managed on this occasion to maintain control of the situation in the property with the threat of violence. That is except for Wilson's sister who managed to escape out the back door without their noticing. She was not able to raise the alarm of the incident that was unfolding in her home in time to save her brother because all phone lines in the area

⁷⁶⁹ Bradley, *Insider*, pp.248-254.

⁷⁷⁰ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 191.

were unavailable due to a recent PIRA bomb attack on the Caledon telephone exchange; consequently, she had to deliver the information in person at the local Caledon RUC station.

Often, the terrifying dynamics of these events in and of themselves, were sufficient to deter bystanders from taking action that would alter the outcome of events. Depositions given at the inquest into the killing of Edward Patrick Bonner at the Grosvenor Homing Pigeons Social Club in West Belfast on 2 October 1972 agree that everyone present (door staff and 20-30 patrons) lined up against the wall of the bar (and faced it) as they had been instructed by the two PIRA gunmen – reported to have been in their 20s, of no more than average height, clad in make-shift balaclava's fashioned from woollen hats, and armed with a small handgun each – who proceeded to shoot Mr Bonner in the head at close range (as an alleged informer).⁷⁷¹

The wife of Private Tommy Fletcher was home when four, stocking-mask clad PIRA gunmen, came to the property with the intention of assassinating her husband. It was approximately 8 a.m. on 1 March 1972 and Private Fletcher was outside preparing to leave their farm at Frevagh (near Garrison, straddling the border with the Republic at Co. Fermanagh) for work. The gunmen entered the property by holding the Private at gunpoint, relieved the couple of their personal weapons (a pistol and a shotgun) before informing Mrs Fletcher that they were taking her husband away with them as a hostage, a lie presumably told to prevent the situation from escalating out of their control. In actual fact, Private Fletcher was taken 150

⁷⁷¹ 'Coroner's Inquest relating to the death of Edward Patrick Bonner', 25 January 1973, PRONI, BELF/6/1/1/38/17A; McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 625.

yard outside their home to a nearby field where it seems he faced a fatal hail of bullets: 22 rounds were fired and 14 are said to have hit the soldier.⁷⁷²

On other occasions the PIRA sought to maintain control over the situation by deception or disguise. On 22 April 1978 RUC photographer Miller McAllister was shot by two men who had he had just taken around the back of his property – a detached bungalow in Woodland Park, Lisburn (Co. Antrim) – he believed, to show them his holding of racing pigeons in which they had expressed an interest.⁷⁷³ An account of the incident in *Anatomy of a Killing*, by Ian Cobain details the extensive forward preparation involved in the killing: researching the individual, taking the owner of a car hostage so they could use it to drive to the RUC man's home undetected; the developing of a cover story that was sufficiently convincing to gain access to the man without raising the suspicions of their son who opened the door.⁷⁷⁴

The PIRA observed their targets to learn their routines, but the PIRA could never guarantee being able to predict or control who was occupying a public space at the moment they decided to make an assassination attempt; in these situations, the PIRA were reliant on their ability to elicit compliance through the threat of violence. A case in point was the assassination of part-time UDR Lance-Corporal David Graham on 15 March 1977. The PIRA volunteers involved had planned to shoot the UDR man upon his arrival at his other place of employment, a cement fabrication plant in Coalisland (Dungannon, Co. Tyrone).⁷⁷⁵ The gunmen had arrived sufficiently early to gather the unsuspecting UDR man's colleagues and

⁷⁷² McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 287.

⁷⁷³ *Ibid.*, reference: 2017.

⁷⁷⁴ Cobain, *Anatomy*, pp.170-284.

⁷⁷⁵ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 1905.

lock them in a room, before he was due to arrive that morning to ensure they could not thwart their plans; they had perhaps not anticipated that he would not be alone when he arrived. On the morning of the attack Graham had clocked-in for work and was just making his way, alongside a colleague, to the factory canteen when two PIRA gunmen, armed with a (.38) revolver and a shotgun, respectively, stepped out of a nearby doorway. The colleague was told to step aside 'or he'd get it too'; a threat sufficiently terrifying to frighten the bystander into inaction as they opened fired on his colleague. David Graham is said to have suffered as many as 24 gunshot wounds and died two days after the shooting attack, on 25 March 1977, in hospital.

The PIRA were able to kidnap part-time UDR Captain Cormac McCabe from a hotel restaurant in Monaghan where he had gone to dine with his family on 20 January 1974 without raising the alarm of others in the restaurant at the time; his body was found the next day, blind-folded, shot, and discarded near Altadavin, (near Clogher, Co.Tyrone).⁷⁷⁶ But the attack on Catholic RUC Officer Peter Flannaghan is reported to have caused an altogether more frantic and distressing scene in the busy public establishment in which he was targeted. According to Sean O'Callaghan, the PIRA member responsible for the assassination, the plan had been to shoot the RUC officer in a pub on 23 August 1974, rather than attempt to abduct and remove him from the public space first, as Captain McCabe's killers had done earlier in the year.⁷⁷⁷ O'Callaghan recognised that the RUC officer, who was sitting at the bar with a drink and newspaper, 'understood what was happening' as soon as

⁷⁷⁶ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 999.

⁷⁷⁷ O'Callaghan, *The Informer*, pp.103-109.

he and his accomplice walked into the bar – Broderick’s public house in Omagh – armed with revolvers:

He ... began to move from his stool: ‘No, please no!’ I steadied, took, aim and fired. He was still moving, trying to escape. He stumbled to the door leading to the toilets and fell through it. I fired eight times in total and knew that most of, if not all, my shots had hit him.....The other customers and the barman were stunned, in shock. One woman said something. I told her to be quiet: ‘Just sit down, shut up and nothing will happen to you.’ Most of the faces were frozen; the murder had taken only seconds and it looked as though no one had moved.⁷⁷⁸

There are several other occasions where the risk inherent in these dangerous tactics materialised; civilians were injured or killed in the process because the PIRA gunmen fired off-target, indiscriminately, or applied violence to restrain them as they attempted to prevent them from harming their loved ones.

The ten-year old daughter of (Catholic) part-time UDR officer Sean Russell was injured during the assault on her father on 8 December 1971. Gunmen are said to have forced their way into the living room of the Russell family home in New Barnsley (West Belfast) after the door was opened by one of the part-time soldier’s sons. Russell was shot twice upon confirming his identity to the gunmen; a third shot was fired into a wall after a family member grabbed the gunman’s arm in a bid to halt the attack.⁷⁷⁹ The 11-year-old daughter of Sergeant Henry Dickson was said to have been ‘hit in the leg but was not seriously

⁷⁷⁸ Ibid., pp.107-108.

⁷⁷⁹ McKittrick et al., *Lost Lives*, reference: 210.

injured' when two PIRA gunmen opened fire on her father in the hallway of their home in Lawrence Square (Lurgan, Co. Armagh) at approximately 10 p.m. on 29 February 1972.⁷⁸⁰

It seems that the PIRA's operations were significantly more likely to go out-of-control when they involved gunmen seeking to gain control over people who were aware they were about to bear witness to the imminent assassination of a colleague or loved one. The PIRA claimed that Violet Mackin was shot and killed in her home on Oldpark Road, Belfast on 4 February 1979 'as she struggled for her husband's life but that she had not been their target.'⁷⁸¹ They did not offer an explanation as to why they shot Emily Bullock in the doorway of her property at Killynick (Aghalane Co. Fermanagh) on 21 September 1972.⁷⁸² Explanations of the actions taken by the gunmen responsible for shooting both Emily and Thomas Bullock, her husband and UDR officer could include that: they fired before they could properly identify who had opened the door to them, they decided to shoot Mrs Bullock because she (like Mrs Mackin) attempted to thwart their plans to kill her husband, or they did not care to discriminate between civilians and those the organisation claimed were legitimate targets of assassination, on this occasion.

PIRA bombing attacks could also fall into this category when the target was a space that was occupied with civilians, the tactic involved the issuing a warning ahead of time, and the outcome was dependent on said warning leading to the premises being evacuated. Bomb-

⁷⁸⁰ Ibid., reference: 286.

⁷⁸¹ Ibid., references: 2074-2075.

⁷⁸² Ibid., references: 602-603.

warnings could be issued verbally – live – by those planting the bomb; or routed to the security services via anonymous phone calls and intermediaries. The precise timeframe in which civilians were notified of the imminent need to vacate a premises could range accordingly, from mere seconds to minutes or hours.

The youths responsible for planting a command-wired IED to target soldiers on 17 July 1973 are believed to have encouraged civilians to clear the area before the attack and had one person acting as look-out to signal when the device should be fired.⁷⁸³ The 20lb bomb had been placed in a cardboard box behind a mattress in an electric fuse-box cupboard on the top level of one of the links that connected the 12 flat areas in the complex and housed the stairways, elevators, electricity equipment and refuse disposal. The explosion, which occurred around 2.40 p.m., killed two of the four-soldier patrol and caused serious injuries to the others including the total visual impairment of Corporal Peart.

At other times the PIRA selected a single prestigious target to attack using the tactic of issuing advanced notice of their assault. On 6 March 1976 the PIRA attacked Aldergrove Civil Airport (now Belfast international Airport) with a 14 barrel (Mark 6) mortar device, which had been mounted in sand on the back of vehicle.⁷⁸⁴ The incident was described in the NIO summary of security events as one of ‘several spectacular attacks ... mounted against prestige targets’ in the recent period.⁷⁸⁵ Each of the bombs contained approximately 5lb of

⁷⁸³ R v Nolan and Others, *Northern Ireland Unreported Judgments*, Belfast City Commission, 6 March 1974; 14 – 20 July 1973 in ‘NIO Summary 1973’, TNA, CJ 4/1024; McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references 898-899.

⁷⁸⁴ Patrick, *Fetch Felix*, pp.58-60.

⁷⁸⁵ March 1976 in ‘NIO Summary 1975-1976’, TNA, CJ 4/1237.

homemade explosives (ammonium nitrate and aluminium, or 'ANAL').⁷⁸⁶ According to journalist David Barzilay the device was 'a fragmentation bomb specifically designed for anti-personnel use. They were meant to kill and maim people.'⁷⁸⁷ Yet, all accounts agree that there were no casualties were caused and damage was slight.⁷⁸⁸ Not all of the fourteen devices exploded – reports suggest that eight or nine of the rounds exploded; the locations these rounds hit are said to have included the Arrivals building and Departures lounge, but mainly the carpark.⁷⁸⁹ Casualties were avoided in a large part, because PIRA issued a 30-minute warning in advance of the attack, which proved sufficient for the necessary evacuation of 200-300 people from the buildings.

The fact any of these cases involved the PIRA issuing a bomb warning demonstrates some level of effort was being made to avoid collateral damage. The case was made in part I of the thesis that it was certainly in their interests for them to do so. However, this is not to say that the bomb-warning tactic was by any means robust. To the contrary, the bomb-warning system relied upon many forces outside PIRA control and could break down for any number of reasons.

⁷⁸⁶ Patrick, *Fetch Felix*, pp.58-60.

⁷⁸⁷ Barzilay, *Volume 4*, pp.41.

⁷⁸⁸ 26 February – 10 March 1976 in 'NIO Summary 1974-1975', TNA, CJ 4/1787; March 1976 in 'NIO Summary 1975-1976', TNA, CJ 4/1237; 'Northern Ireland: Ira Weapons', Written Answers, 25 March 1976, Hansard, vol. 908, column. 278, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1976-03-25/debates/cd79d827-4527-4da2-b06a-ffb1ef1e97ce/IraWeapons>, (20/04/2022).

⁷⁸⁹ 'Monday 6 March', *Fortnight*, no. 125 (Apr. 23, 1976), pp. 9-12.

Sometimes the PIRA's IEDs exploded when they were being primed, killing or maiming the volunteers (and those around them) well before they had intended to phone in a warning. The Dunmurry train bomb disaster of 1980 (described in part I) is an example of this.⁷⁹⁰

At other times IEDs went off later than the PIRA had suggested in their warnings. If the security forces had already ensured the vicinity was evacuated and had begun working on neutralising the threat of the device, this could pose a significant risk to their safety, and result in a 'desirable' outcome for the PIRA, despite the technical flaws in the execution of their tactic. A case-in-point occurred on 28 November 1972 when the PIRA planted a bomb in Long's supermarket on the Strand Road in Derry.⁷⁹¹ The PIRA informed staff and customers that the device would explode in four minutes time, but the device exploded some 45 minutes later. The explosion occurred coincidentally at precisely the same moment as the bomb disposal team arrived in their Saracen armoured vehicle to investigate. Regimental photographer Gunner Paul Jackson happened to be looking through the small viewing hatch in the armoured vehicle at the time, and received a fatal shrapnel wound to the head consequently.

Sometimes the PIRA faced difficulty when trying to send warning of the bomb they had just primed to explode. The PIRA members involved in planting the time-operated IED – attached to around four cans of petrol to boost its incendiary effect – at the La Mon House

⁷⁹⁰ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference 2208-2210; NIO, *The Day of Men and Women of Peace*, p.26-27; *Belfast Graves*, pp.168-169; 15 - 29 January 1980 in 'NIO Summary 1977-1980', TNA, CJ 4/3692; January 1980 in 'NIO Summary 1979-1978', TNA, CJ 4/3095.

⁷⁹¹ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 685; Gurney, *Braver Men*, pp.147-148.

hotel on 17 February 1978, struggled to find a working payphone with which to deliver a warning of the intense and imminent danger that dinner-dance guests were facing.⁷⁹²

Warning of the device was telephoned to Newtownards RUC 8.57 p.m. which was literally moments before the device exploded: 12 people died and more than 30 were injured as the fireball tore through the building, creating serious injuries and damage through extreme temperatures.

On other occasions the PIRA would fail to get the device to the right place at the right time, meaning that the warnings they had already delivered were incorrect or dangerously misleading. It only took the introduction of a new one-way traffic system in Coleraine to render the bomb warnings delivered in advance of a car bomb attack in June 1973 fatally inaccurate.⁷⁹³ PIRA volunteer Sean McGlinchy (Sinn Féin Councillor since 2011) was just 18 years of age when he found himself in the situation whereby he was in the wrong place at the wrong time with a bomb that was primed and ready to detonate in a matter of moments. That he regretted the attack would not alter the fact that the next 18 years of his life would be spent behind bars serving six life sentences:

There are six innocent people killed but we never meant that. I am up to my neck in it. I didn't intend the bombs to injure anyone.⁷⁹⁴

There were instances when the PIRA's bomb warnings gave insufficient time for civilians to be evacuated, causing injuries or loss of life in the local population. On 8 December 1976

⁷⁹² McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 1992-1999, 2001-2003.

⁷⁹³ *Coleraine Times*, 8 June 2011, <https://www.colerainetimes.co.uk/news/we-forgive-you-1-2754310>; (03/01/2019); *BBC News*, 30 October 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-15158068>, (20/12/2018).

⁷⁹⁴ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 870.

the PIRA planted a device outside a drawing office on University Road in Belfast. RUC officers were still in the process of evacuating the area – which was mainly populated with university students – when the device exploded causing injuries to a police officer and two students: ‘A policeman was blown off his feet and broke both legs and two students were buried under rubble and had to be dug out.’⁷⁹⁵

Other times the warnings issued by the PIRA lacked vital details regarding the precise location of their bombing devices, or were simply inaccurate.⁷⁹⁶ The 30-minute warning given in advance of the explosion of four devices that had been planted on the Dublin to Belfast Enterprise Train on 12 October 1978 which killed one civilian and injured 4 others was inaccurate and, therefore, fatally misleading: the message reversed the order of the place names, sending the security force response in pursuit of a Belfast to Dublin train instead.⁷⁹⁷

Other cases demonstrate that civilians can be harmed even when the PIRA delivered accurate bomb warnings and their devices exploded when and where the PIRA intended. This could be because the plan was never feasible in the first place. The PIRA would sometimes use the bomb-warning tactic to perpetrate a high volume of smaller attacks. For example, on 13 April 1972 the PIRA instigated 30 separate bombing attacks on what the Irish Republican Publicity Bureau of Dublin described as ‘administrative, commercial and

⁷⁹⁵Wharton, *Wasted Years*, p. 292.

⁷⁹⁶ ‘The IRA says...’, *Irish News*, 27 November 1974, p.9.

⁷⁹⁷ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 2058.

industrial targets'.⁷⁹⁸ These included the new telephone exchange at Mayobridge (Co. Down) which had not yet come into use and was completely vacant at 21:40 when it was attacked, and the Beechlawn hotel in Dunnmurry (Co. Antrim) which was safely evacuated before the explosion following advanced warning of the bomb.⁷⁹⁹ The fire which engulfed the home of Elizabeth McAuley, a 65-year-old Protestant from Antrim was not the primary or intended goal of the Provisional IRA members involved.⁸⁰⁰ Rather, the fire was started by one of the explosions the PIRA caused that evening.

A call was received at the telephone exchange at 23:59 to give warning that a bomb was 'in Dollar bar, Main Street, Ballymoney' (Co. Antrim).⁸⁰¹ The RUC responded to the call where they are reported to have seen that a bomb had been placed in a grey-coloured van that had been previously stolen and was parked outside the bar at 52 Main St, and so they began clearing the area urgently. The bomb is reported to have exploded at 00:40, after which the RUC began a rescue operation on the flat. Just after the explosion the log states: '1 man rescued, 1 woman missing.' The rescued man was Mr McCauley. The missing woman was Mrs McCauley who sadly died in the incident. The IED is reported to have contained 2 bags of fertiliser-based explosives (HME) estimated to have weighed anything between 50 and 1000lb. Main Street was said to be 'gutted'. The demeanour of those convicted of manslaughter can also be noteworthy. The man convicted of manslaughter in relation to the

⁷⁹⁸ *Belfast Telegraph*, 14 April 1972, pp.1,2,7; 13 April 1972, 'HQNI Diary, April – May 72', TNA, WO 305/4199; *Fortnight*, No. 38 (Apr. 27, 1972), pp. 15-17.

⁷⁹⁹ *Belfast Telegraph*, 14 April 1972, pp.1,2,7.

⁸⁰⁰ April 1972, 'HQNI Diary, April – May 72', TNA, WO 305/4199; *Fortnight*, No. 38 (Apr. 27, 1972), pp. 15-17.

⁸⁰¹ 13 April 1972, references:2,6,8, 'HQNI Diary, April – May 72', TNA, WO 305/4199; *Fortnight*, No. 38 (Apr. 27, 1972), pp. 15-17; McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 333.

incident was recorded to have told a police officer 'I was just made to drive the motor, that is all', and reportedly wept throughout the court hearing.⁸⁰²

The most famous example of the PIRA overestimating the ability of the security forces to deal with multiple demands to evacuate civilians from the vicinity of an IED device occurred on 21 July 1972, 'Bloody Friday'. The PIRA planted 20 devices set to detonate within the space of an hour in public spaces.⁸⁰³ Brendan Hughes (former Officer Commanding of the PIRA Belfast Brigade) was involved in arranging and coordinating the attack. According to his version of events, it had not been the PIRA's intention for the civilian casualties to be caused – nine people were killed and 130 injured, regardless.⁸⁰⁴

Often PIRA operations deviated from what had been originally planned because their success depended on the actions of civilians being predictable. There was one customer and a few members of staff inside the pub at the junction of the Lisburn Road and Ashley in South Belfast that three PIRA members, one of whom had been armed with a pistol, entered with the intention of planting a 20lb bomb on 21 December 1971.⁸⁰⁵ 'Don't move or I will blow your fucking head off', the gunman declared as his colleagues set the device down on the counter of the bar. Everyone except the owner of the pub was unharmed in the ensuing

⁸⁰² *Belfast Telegraph*, 15 April 1972, p.1.

⁸⁰³ Including, Smithfield bus station, railway terminals in great Victoria Street and York Street, Queen's Bridge, a M2 motorway flyover bridge, railway bridges at Botanic Avenue, Windsor Park football ground and Finaghy Rd, North, gas department offices, garages in Donegall Street and Upper Lisburn Road, the Brookvale Hotel, a bar in the docks area, a taxi office on the Crumlin Road, a transformer in Salisbury Avenue, and shops on the limestone Road.

⁸⁰⁴ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 487;488;489;490;491;492;493;494;495; Ed Moloney, *Voices from the Grave: Two Men's War in Ireland* (London, 2010), pp.103-107.

⁸⁰⁵ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 226; Deutsch and Magowan, *Volume 1*, p.145.

explosion because they evacuated the premises. However, Publican John Lavery was sadly killed in the process of trying to remove the device from the property.

Civilian deaths that resulted in such scenarios were a source of bad publicity for the Provisional IRA. It seems that, at least on one occasion, the PIRA felt the best way to deal with this was by adopting a violent deterrent. In January 1974 the PIRA issued the following statement after they kneecapped a civilian who carried a bomb out of a shop in Derry:

This action was carried out because the person in question carried out a primed bomb from a shop in Strand Road, endangering the lives of other civilians. The same punishment will be inflicted on persons who are guilty of similar actions in the future.⁸⁰⁶

It is clear that issuing advanced notice of an IED was no guarantee that civilian casualties would be avoided. The cases described above demonstrate that the PIRA's decision to employ the tactic had serious consequences for the lives and limbs of the local population. As inherently risk intense as it was, the tactic did also, however, work more often than not, and allowed the PIRA to generate a huge amount of destruction with far less collateral damage than might be expected. This is perhaps why the tactic is noted in ethicist Michael Gross's discussion of the application of just war theory principle in the context of asymmetric conflict in *The Ethics of Insurgency* (2015).⁸⁰⁷ Still, this is not to say that there is any moral high ground to be occupied by saving those from harm who, except for your actions, would otherwise not face it.

⁸⁰⁶ *Irish News*, 1 January 1976, p.6.

⁸⁰⁷ Gross, *Ethics of Insurgency*, p.168.

Finally, the proxy driver or ‘human bomb’ tactic (discussed in part 1) clearly relied on the actions of others to succeed. Proxy drivers often followed PIRA instructions for fear of the consequences. Several drove the vehicle containing a PIRA bomb to the intended target or parked it very close by if they had taken a wrong turning. However, there were times when proxy-drivers chose to disobey PIRA instructions in spite of the serious threats they had received and took their bombs to open spaces to reduce the likelihood of others being harmed. An example of was reported in the NIO Summary of Events for 14 February 1974.⁸⁰⁸

They hijacked a Post Office van in Dungannon on 14 February [1974], transferred 750lbs of explosives into the van and then ordered the driver, threatened to detonate the bomb by radio control if he disobeyed, to park his car in a narrow alley by the RUC station. The driver managed to dump the van in the largest open space in Dungannon then raised the alarm: there were no casualties but the subsequent explosion, one of the largest ever in a town, caused extensive damage to property.⁸⁰⁹

In all cases, the PIRA cannot be said to have been in control of the situation when they used the proxy-driver tactic.

Indiscriminate Tactics I: Indiscriminate Weapons

PIRA operations involving victim-operated IEDs (VOIEDs) had a higher risk of causing collateral damage than those involving weapons that the PIRA fired manually (such as a command wire or radio-control initiated IEDs). This is because the weapon is not designed to discriminate between the intended and unintended target of the attack – whoever inadvertently triggers the device will face the destructive force of the weapon.

⁸⁰⁸ 16 February - 1 March 1974 in ‘NIO Summary 1974-1975’, TNA, CJ 4/1787.

⁸⁰⁹ 16 February - 1 March 1974 in ‘NIO Summary 1974-1975’, TNA, CJ 4/1787.

This observation is corroborated by examples of instances when the indiscriminate character of a VOIED was considered pertinent in determining the criminal sentence issued to those found to have been guilty (beyond a reasonable doubt) of using them. A case in point relates to the murder of David Andrew Bogle on 18 August 1990, for which a 22-year-old man received a life-sentence.⁸¹⁰

Bogle was a mechanical digger driver who was in the employment of a company whose builder's yard was located near Castlederg (Co. Tyrone). The company was targeted because the PIRA claimed it assisted the security forces. The part-time labourer was killed outright when he started the digger's engine and unwittingly triggered a victim-operated IED planted by the PIRA and consisting of 1lb Semtex concealed inside a hollowed-out piece of wood which was activated by a mercury tilt-switch. The nature of the device used in the attack was discussed in the initial case and referenced again a year later specifically, as part of the evidence used to quash the appellant's subsequent appeal case and uphold the original sentence:

We consider that the learned judge was right to focus on the nature of the device. There may be some types of bombs which by their nature appear to be intended for use against property rather than people. Others may be so clearly designed for killing or maiming human victims. In our opinion the bomb in the present case falls into the latter category.... We entirely agree with the judge that the conclusion is irresistible that murder was at least a possible purpose of those whom the appellant assisted. We accordingly dismiss the appellant's appeal against his conviction of murder.⁸¹¹

⁸¹⁰ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 3129.

⁴ R v Gallen, *Northern Ireland Unreported Judgements*, (1994), Lexis Citation: 5218.

This thesis argues that the risk that collateral damage would result from PIRA operations involving VOIEDs could also be amplified when these devices were used in combination with certain tactics, or in different types of environment.

All VOIEDs will be planted in a concealed place or disguised in some way because their function depends on their evading the notice of the intended target. Of course, a VOIED is equally likely to go unnoticed by individuals, other than the intended target, who encounter them for this reason. However, it could be more or less likely that someone would be in the wrong place at the wrong time, depending on the scenario in which the VOIED was used by the PIRA.

VOIEDs were less likely to be triggered by a person other than the intended target if the operation involved the PIRA issuing a warning ahead of time, planting the device in a location that was highly unlikely to be occupied by civilians, or luring the intended victim towards the device. Examples of cases when these tactics had been used demonstrate there were times that they proved effective mechanisms for preventing collateral damage from occurring. However, there are also examples of cases when collateral damage occurred, regardless. For this reason, it is argued that we must categorise any operation involving a VOIED as indiscriminate, no matter what tactics had been involved.

There are occasions when the PIRA endeavoured to ensure that civilians were warned that a VOIED had been planted in their home or car, so that they knew to stay clear until the

security forces had neutralised or fallen victim to the device. The fact that there are occasions when these warnings were disbelieved or disregarded demonstrates that this tactic could not guarantee that civilians would stay clear of the weapon.

In May 1974 Alfred Shotter was killed by a victim-operated bomb which had been planted in his home on Strabane Old Road in Derry by the PIRA, while he had been away on holiday.⁸¹² Shotter is said to have declared 'there is no bomb in my home' before entering the property against the advice of his neighbours.⁸¹³ Shotter was killed outright and his daughter-in-law lost an eye and a leg in the blast. During the trial of one of the PIRA volunteers involved, the court heard that the device had been placed inside a bin to the rear of the property and was triggered as Shotter walked past it.⁸¹⁴ The Derry branch of the PIRA claimed responsibility for the attack and issued a statement that expressed their regret but also attempted to shift blame back onto the victim by highlighting that a warning had been issued on this occasion:

Volunteers alerted the occupants of neighbouring houses and as well the Army were alerted by an anonymous caller.....Unfortunately, the owner of the house came on the scene with his daughter-in-law and another woman and ignored all pleas warning him not to go near the house. Our sympathies are no consolation for this tragedy, yet we feel that if the British Army would withdraw from the North of Ireland a lasting peace would ensue. Our fight will continue against British occupation, and we are determined to keep going until the British set a date for withdrawal.⁸¹⁵

There was a higher risk of collateral damage occurring when VOIEDs were planted in combination with a warning in a public space. This is simply because there was a high

⁸¹² 'Derry, bomb victim gravely ill', *Sunday Independent (Dublin)*, 02 June 1974, p.6.

⁸¹³ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 1136.

⁸¹⁴ Suggesting that the VOIED was activated by a tripwire or anti-lift mechanism. 'Derry youth gets life for killer blast', *Belfast Telegraph*, 04 February 1975, p.7.

⁸¹⁵ "'Sorry Provos' admit Derry killing', *Belfast Telegraph*, 04 June 1974, p.2.

chance that there would be someone present who might disbelieve or disregard the warning.

On 28 November 1976 the PIRA planted a VOIED in an alleyway in the Brandywell area of Derry to target soldiers who were patrolling the area. When it became apparent that the bomb had failed to fulfil its intended purpose, the PIRA issued a warning about the device – the area was cordoned-off by the security forces consequently.⁸¹⁶ The bomb-disposal unit had still not arrived to investigate the suspect device by 10 a.m. the following day, but it is reported that a ‘tight cordon had been maintained’ throughout the night. However, around this time the cordon was lifted because it was feared that the security forces were at risk from prospective PIRA snipers. Soon after, the VOIED was triggered by local resident Frank McConnellogue – killing him outright – as he attempted to warn others about the danger it posed.

The Brandywell alley VOIED incident demonstrates that the behaviour of others is inherently unpredictable and beyond the control of PIRA bombers in two different ways. Firstly, because McConnellogue’s actions demonstrates that individuals may risk their own safety to save others, if they are inclined towards the acts of heroism normally associated with a fight (as opposed to flight) physiological response to perceived danger. Secondly, because civilians do not always believe or understand they are in danger when they are warned about it. Indeed, it is reported that the two men that Frank McConnellogue spotted entering the alleyway, through a side door, had been warned twice already not to do so by the RUC.

⁸¹⁶ ‘Help Stop Killing of Innocents’, *Belfast Telegraph*, 29 November 1976, p.1; Derek Brown, ‘Booby traps kill two in Ulster’, *The Guardian*, 29 November 1976, p.1; McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 1853.

The apologies issued by the PIRA in the aftermath of Frank McDonnellogue's death were unsurprisingly reported to have a 'particularly hollow ring'.⁸¹⁷

Editorial and public opinion pieces published at the time also suggest that this type of weapon was judged to transgress a moral boundary by the general public. The author of an opinion piece published by the *Belfast Telegraph*, for example, was explicit about the connection between the indiscriminate character of the weapon and their disgust over the PIRA's actions:

Those who put together the hideous devices in residential areas with the clear intent of taking life realise fully how they were endangering everyone in the vicinity. They know as well as anybody bombs do not discriminate between victims. Perhaps once again they trusted in the tragically mistaken belief in their own infallibility.⁸¹⁸

It was more common for the PIRA to plant a VOIED inside a property that belonged to the intended target, or a vacant premises that they would lure the intended (security force) target towards by making a false report of suspicious activity having occurred there. Two soldiers were killed after being lured to a derelict farmhouse in Cullyhannah on 20 November 1972 after reports that 'suspicious activity' had occurred there.⁸¹⁹

The PIRA was less likely to achieve their goal of inflicting military casualties if the warnings they issued about a VOIED were too specific, because the bomb-disposal unit would be tasked to investigate the threat. A thatched cottage in Dungannon was said to have been 'demolished' by a controlled explosion (i.e. the PIRA's IED was triggered intentionally by,

⁸¹⁷ 'Crocodile Tears' *Belfast Telegraph*, 29 November 1976, p.1.

⁸¹⁸ Ibid.

⁸¹⁹ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 675-676.

and under the careful supervision of the bomb-disposal unit) on 26 June 1972 after the RUC received a warning from an anonymous caller who suggested that the building had been booby-trapped.⁸²⁰

Advance notice of the VOIEDs that had been planted by the PIRA did not prevent fatalities on other occasions. Miscommunication about the status of security-checks appears to have been a factor in some cases. The fact that the security forces had failed to identify the VOIED that PIRA bomb warnings related to was pertinent on other occasions. The PIRA remained culpable for the consequences of their decision to use VOIEDs in both scenarios.

On 18 September 1972 Mr Edmund Woolsey was driven to Glassdrummed in South Armagh by a friend to collect his vehicle that had been stolen ten days earlier.⁸²¹ According to the friend, Woolsey had called Crossmaglen RUC station and was told by a soldier that the abandoned vehicle had been checked and was safe for them to collect. However, this proved not to be the case when the car-owner turned his key in the engine and triggered a large explosion, killing him outright. The *Armagh Observer* reported that local residents had commented that the only security force involvement with the vehicle had been to circle overhead in a helicopter and that police spokesperson said: 'no assurance of any sort was given by the security forces that the car was safe.'⁸²²

⁸²⁰ Belfast History Project, *Troubles Magazine*, issue 14, p.63, <http://www.belfasthistoryproject.com/the-troubles/#>, (07/01/2023).

⁸²¹ 'Border car bomb fatality', *Belfast Telegraph*, 19 September 1972, pp.1,3; McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 598.

⁸²² *Armagh Observer*, 23 September 1972, p.6.

The RUC went to investigate a derelict cottage in an orchard located by Moy Road, near Portadown (Co. Armagh), on the evening of 15 May 1973 after an anonymous caller informed the Portadown telephone exchange that 'There's a bomb in the second house in Moy'.⁸²³ The RUC searched the cottage – which is reported to have belonged to a male who was serving a three-year prison sentence for petrol-bombing – but did not find the device. Just one hour later, however, wood-cutter Robert David (Roy) Rutherford inadvertently triggered the device while following some wires that they had noticed to be curiously out-of-place in the orchard.⁸²⁴ Soon after the explosion Secretary of State (SSNI) William Whitelaw issued a statement to warn the public about the dangers that were posed by PIRA VOIEDs.⁸²⁵ Whitelaw specifically emphasised that it was dangerous for children to play in empty houses and stressed that that anyone seeing anything suspicious should inform the security forces at once. It is clear that this was by no means an empty threat nor anti-PIRA propaganda piece on the part of the SSNI for, children had indeed fallen victim to PIRA VOIEDs in recent months.

On 25 February 1973 the PIRA attempted to lure soldiers towards a victim-operated device they had concealed in the far corner of the garden of a private family home in Leenan Gardens on the Creggan Estate (Co. Derry).⁸²⁶ A warning of the danger facing the Gallagher family who lived at the property did not reach them, for the anonymous caller is said to

⁸²³ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 842; 14 May 1973, references: 32,34, and 15 May 1973, reference: 3, 'HQ3 Diary May 73', TNA, WO 305/4213; 4 - 10 May 1973 in 'NIO Summary 1973', TNA, CJ 4/1024.

⁸²⁴ 14 May 1973, references: 32,34, and 15 May 1973, reference: 3, 'HQ3 Diary May 73', TNA, WO 305/4213.

⁸²⁵ Quoted in Belfast History Project, *Troubles Magazine*, issue 21, p.19, <http://www.belfasthistoryproject.com/the-troubles/#>, (07/01/2023).

⁸²⁶ 23 February - 1 March 1973 in 'NIO Summary 1973', TNA, CJ 4/1024; McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference 779; Coroner's Inquest relating to the death of Gordon William Gallagher', 11 June 1974, PRONI, LOND/6/1/1/11/49A.

have given the army the address of a property located one street away from the home of the seven-child family, which was searched and confirmed to be free from explosives. For this reason, the parents of nine-year old Gordon William Gallagher would have had no reason to suspect that it was dangerous for their son to continue playing ‘cowboys and Indians’ in the garden with their siblings. The 10lb VOIED exploded when Gordon disturbed the tripwire that was designed to trigger the device – sadly, the child died later that day from his injuries.⁸²⁷ The PIRA sought to place the blame on the army for the death of the child by issuing a (baseless) claim that the military had purposefully activated the device to generate public condemnation of the PIRA.⁸²⁸ The army issued a counter-statement to clarify that the PIRA were wholly culpable for the child’s death:

the army does not lay bombs or mines in any place and the terrorists cannot shift blame for their original crime of placing explosives in a dangerous condition near where children play.⁸²⁹

VOIED-related civilian deaths do not seem to have deterred the PIRA from using these weapons or tactics. The month after Rutherford was killed, Corporal David Smith was killed, two soldiers were injured, and three children had to be treated for minor cuts and shock after an explosion occurred in a derelict property in the Ballycolman estate in Strabane (Co. Tyrone) on 21 June 1973.⁸³⁰ Corporal Smith and his injured colleagues were part of an army patrol that were conducting searches of vacant properties in the area after it was reported that ‘men had been acting suspiciously in the area’ – the injured children were local to the area and had been playing close by.

⁸²⁷ Coroner’s Inquest relating to the death of Gordon William Gallagher’, 11 June 1974, PRONI, LOND/6/1/11/49A.

⁸²⁸ The inquest report includes several eyewitness accounts which collectively establish that i) the child triggered the device and ii) there were no military personnel present in the lead up to the explosion. Ibid.

⁸²⁹ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: reference: 779.

⁸³⁰ Ibid., reference: 881.

The PIRA attempted to lure security-force targets towards VOIEDs they had planted with tactics that were less revealing of their intentions than false reports or bomb-warnings. These tactics are described in military sources as a 'come-on' and could include the staging of provocative scenes, or the (loud) firing of weapons to draw the attention of nearby soldiers or police. The come-on was also an altogether less explicit way to warn anyone other than the intended target about the dangers associated with coming into contact with the VOIED which the PIRA had planted (had that been the concern of the volunteers involved). It is, therefore, hardly surprising to find that there are cases when collateral damage occurred when the PIRA had used these tactics.

On 9 February 1971 a PIRA bomb caused damage to a BBC transmitter on Brougher Mountain (Co. Tyrone).⁸³¹ The bomb-damage was intended to serve as a 'come-on' for the tripwire initiated IED that the PIRA had concealed close by. The intended target for this VOIED was the security-force personnel known to routinely inspect the transmitter. However, it was a BBC Landover carrying five workmen tasked with investigating the transmission outage who actually fell victim to the device. Lieutenant-Colonel George Styles recorded in his memoir, *Bombs Have No Pity* (1975) that the public reaction to the incident was 'strong and swift':

The public reaction to the outrage was strong and swift. The public realised that the person who laid bombs didn't have to have any guts. And that he didn't care who got killed by his infernal devices. Just put them on a mountain road and let some ordinary workmen die.⁸³²

⁸³¹ Philip Bradfield, 'IRA bomb killed five BBC workers on Brougher Mountain - families reflect on loss of fathers and brothers on 50th anniversary', *Belfast Newsletter*, 9 February 2021, <https://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/troubles/ira-bomb-killed-five-bbc-workers-on-brougher-mountain-families-reflect-on-loss-of-fathers-and-brothers-on-50th-anniversary-3129582>, (10/06/2021).

⁸³² Styles, *Bombs Have No Pity*, p.102.

At around 7.30 p.m. on 7 February 1976 the PIRA fired shots at Cookstown RUC station.⁸³³

The shots were intended to attract attention and lead police officers to pursue the gunmen in question. The gunfire was, therefore, a ‘come-on’ for the elaborate trap the PIRA had set to target them close by: A 200lb (HME) IED (believed to have been initiated by either tripwire or pressure-plate) that was concealed in a culvert under the road close to a scene the PIRA had staged to appear as though the gunmen had crashed the car in which they were attempting to make their escape. The vehicle, which the PIRA had left parked sticking out of a hedge on the Tyresson Road with its headlights on, had not been the get-away-car used in the attack – it was just a car that the PIRA had hijacked the previous day to use as a prop. The RUC were not the first people to come across the phoney car crash, in spite of the PIRA’s efforts to lure them there. The VOIED they had planted to target them was instead, triggered by siblings Rachel and Robert McLernon – local civilians who happened to be driving in the area at the time. Rachel’s boyfriend, who had also been in the car at the time, said that the McLernon’s had pulled over to investigate the crash after a girl waved at them from the side of the road; and that the explosion occurred as Rachel and Robert were walking away from the crashed vehicle.

A similar tactic was used a year earlier, on 22 January 1975. On this occasion, the PIRA dressed and posed a tailor’s dummy to appear as though it had been the victim of a car crash on the side of the Dublin Road near the Killeen Customs Post, Newry and the border with the Republic of Ireland. They had also filled the dummy with explosives but, on this

⁸³³ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 1610,1611; *Belfast Newsletter*, 9 February 1976, p.1; 29 Jan - 11 February 1976 in ‘NIO Summary 1974-1975’, TNA, CJ 4/1787; February 1976 in ‘NIO Summary 1975-1976’, TNA, CJ 4/1237; Barzilay, *Volume 3*, p.38; TH Fleming, Information Officer at RUC Headquarters ‘Parliamentary Question by Mr. John Parkes MP, for Oral reply on 2 12 1976’, reference: D6 76/77/14, TNA, CJ4/1763; R H Kidd, ‘Statistical Surveys’, 24 November 1976, reference: Cent Sec C15/76, p.3, TNA, CJ4/1763.

occasion, no injuries were caused because the ATO treated what they initially suspected to be a genuine corpse with caution.⁸³⁴

The PIRA's efforts to lure security forces with the sound of gunfire or explosions did result in the deaths of those they considered to be the intended target of their VOIEDs on other occasions. On 17 February 1974 the PIRA caused several explosions in a rural space outside of Moybane (Co. Armagh) when no target was in the vicinity.⁸³⁵ The PIRA were not in the habit of wasting resources. For this reason, it is believed that the explosions they caused on this occasion would have two separate purposes. The first would be to test a new batch of HME or a new type of IED they were developing. The second was to make a loud noise which would serve as a 'come-on' for a VOIED they had planted to target the bomb-disposal team tasked with investigating the explosions after the fact; a tactic described in the NIO summary events as an 'elaborate come on'.⁸³⁶ Bomb disposal expert, Staff Sergeant Alan Brammah, was tasked to the site the following day (18 February 1974). After clearing the remnants of the command-wire IEDs the PIRA had used the previous day, his attention was drawn to an area of earth that had been disturbed. The pressure-plate IED the PIRA had concealed beneath it killed Sgt Brammah as he knelt down to examine it a second time.⁸³⁷

Sometimes the PIRA attracted the attention of the security forces by leaving a box with the word 'Bomb' printed on it in oversized letters on the side in the middle of a road. This was a

⁸³⁴ Barzilay, *Volume 2*, p.50.

⁸³⁵ 16 February - 1 March 1974 in 'NIO Summary 1974-1975', TNA, CJ 4/1787.

⁸³⁶ Ibid.

⁸³⁷ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 1014.

tactic that the PIRA used to serve as 'come-on' for VOIEDs that they planted in- or outside the box. However, it was also a tactic they used in scenarios where they had not planted any bombs at all. The fact that the same tactic was used in both real and hoax attacks could be misleading and did, on some occasions, result in security incidents that involved VOIEDs being mistakenly disregarded as false alarms by those who were sent to investigate them.

On 5 September 1973 the PIRA left a cardboard box marked 'ARMY BEWARE RADIO BOMB' with a flashing light attached to it in the middle of Garrison Road in Greaghmaglera, (near Belcoo, Co. Fermanagh).⁸³⁸ Patrick Duffy, a local farmer, had stayed clear of the area until after the incident had been declared to be a hoax by Belcoo police who had found the box was free from explosives after they fired a shot into it to check. It became clear that said box had only been a decoy a little while later when the 100lb VOIED the PIRA had planted close by was triggered by Duffy's tractors as he made a turn into his field, killing the farmer outright. The commander's diary for Headquarters 3 Infantry Brigade reports that the local population were not satisfied that enough had been done by the police to protect their safety,⁸³⁹ although this seems to be an unfair assessment, given the type of weapons and tactics that had been involved. The fact that Duffy was a Catholic was thought to have brought considerable shame upon the PIRA locally. Headquarters 3 Infantry Brigade's weekly intelligence summary report indicated the PIRA shot and killed part-time UDR soldier Private Mathew Lilley a few days later – on 8 September 1973 at Kellagho near Belcoo while

⁸³⁸ 5 September 1973, references: 13-28, 'HQ3 Diary, September 73', TNA, WO 305/4217; 8 - 12 September 1973 in 'NIO Summary 1973', TNA, CJ 4/1024; Headquarters 3 Infantry Brigade, 'Intelligence Summary No. 36/73 for the period 3 September - 10 September 1973', 11 September 1973, TNA, WO305/4217; McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 935.

⁸³⁹ 5 September 1973, references: 13-28, 'HQ3 Diary, September 73', TNA, WO 305/4217.

he was off-duty – ‘to make up for the poor publicity resulting from the landmine explosion’.

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A box spraypainted with the word ‘BOMB’ and left out in the street to be discovered was not necessarily a decoy. A photograph of a case in point is featured in the memoir of Lieutenant-Colonel George Styles, *Bombs Have No Pity* (1975).⁸⁴¹ The picture-caption explains that the wooden crate once contained a PIRA VOIED with two firing-switches – an anti-open micro-switch under the lid and an anti-lift microswitch at the base i.e., features that meant it would explode if it was either opened or moved. It was ultimately neutralised by the security forces. VOIEDs of this design were nicknamed the ‘Castlerobin’, after the location where the first had been discovered – the small village of Castlerobin (Co. Antrim), on 9 September 1971. There is one significant difference between the Castlerobin pictured in Styles memoir and its 1971 namesake – the first Castlerobin was not marked with any words of warning and could, therefore have quite easily have been mistaken as an ordinary parcel.

The first Castlerobin (VOIED) was concealed inside a rectangular wooden box and left outside the doorway of the Orange Hall in the village.⁸⁴² On this occasion the box appeared sufficiently suspicious in and of itself for the first person to come across it – the local postman – to notify the police without interfering with it first. However, there was

⁸⁴⁰ Headquarters 3 Infantry Brigade, ‘Intelligence Summary No. 36/73 for the period 3 September - 10 September 1973’, 11 September 1973, TNA, WO305/4217; McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 936.

⁸⁴¹ Styles, *Bombs Have No Pity*, pp.48-49.

⁸⁴² Styles, *Bombs Have No Pity*, pp.116-120; McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 122.

absolutely no guarantee that this would have been the case. ATO, Captain Stewardson, was killed by the explosion that occurred after he began to investigate the suspect box. The incident was said to be highly demonstrative of the fact that the PIRA observed the security forces with a view of identifying weak spots in their processes to exploit. This is because the fact that the PIRA had begun to include anti-open and anti-lift micro-switches in their IEDs suggests that they understood that the procedures an ATO was likely to follow at that time included manually opening or at least moving the suspect object. Technology including the wheelbarrow (robot) and x-ray prevented other similar deaths occurring in the future.

In December 1976, the site of a wrecked vehicle – appearing as though it had been the subject of a large explosion on a quiet road, close to the border between County Armagh and the Republic of Ireland – seems in retrospect, to have been another scene that had been staged by the PIRA that proved to be sufficiently suspicious as to deter passers-by from falling victim to the VOIED that it had been designed to serve as the ‘come-on’ for.⁸⁴³ However, civilians did fall victim to VOIEDs concealed in cars in similarly isolated rural locations on other occasions.

The van in which the PIRA had concealed a VOIED, before abandoning it outside of the Three Steps bar (Drumintee, Forkhill, Co. Armagh) on 10 March 1974, must have appeared to be in sufficiently good working order as to appeal to would-be amateur vehicle thieves and

⁸⁴³ On this occasion, the VOIED was concealed in one of the two milk churns that had been discarded next to the car to look as though they had been the containers of a bomb that had exploded in-transit. The car/milk-churn scene stood in place for several weeks without civilians encountering the VOIED. Patrick, *Fetch Felix*, pp.72-76.

joyriders – the widely presumed (if not actually correct) motivations of the group of youths that decided to break into the vehicle, two of whom were sadly killed in the explosion that resulted.⁸⁴⁴

Sometimes the PIRA planted VOIEDs in combination with manually fired weapons in their rural operations. For example, the PIRA would sometimes booby-trap a component of a command wire IED (CWIED) or plant a VOIED somewhere close to it where it had been constructed. They did so with the intention of causing harm to the security-force personnel tasked to the clear-up operation that the PIRA knew from experience would occur after they fired the CWIED, which they might do, for instance, to target a military vehicle or foot patrol.

A case in point occurred at approximately 9 a.m. on 5 May 1973, just outside Moybane (near Crossmaglen).⁸⁴⁵ Warrant Officer 2, William Ronald Vines, was the first soldier killed in the attack – he died when the PIRA detonated the CWIED that they had buried underneath the (intentionally) conspicuous pile of stones at the side of the road that had caught his attention during a routine foot patrol.⁸⁴⁶ Soldiers John Gibbons and Terence Williams were killed a few hours later when they inadvertently triggered the VOIED that the PIRA had concealed on the command wire used to fire the first device. It was reported in an

⁸⁴⁴ 2 - 15 March 1974 in 'NIO Summary 1974-1975', TNA, CJ 4/1787; McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 1025, 1029.

⁸⁴⁵ 5 May 1973, references: 8-26, 'HQ3 Diary May 73', TNA, WO 305/4213; 4-10 May 1973 in 'NIO Summary 1973', TNA, CJ 4/1024; McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references 833-835.

⁸⁴⁶ 5 May 1973, references: 8-26, 'HQ3 Diary May 73', TNA, WO 305/4213; 4-10 May 1973 in 'NIO Summary 1973', TNA, CJ 4/1024; McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references 833-835.

Associated Press television news report that aired soon after the event that an army spokesperson had described the PIRA's operation as 'a very professional job'.⁸⁴⁷ The same could not be said for the PIRA's endeavour to recycle this tactic two months later.

The PIRA volunteers who concealed a CWIED and a VOIED at a derelict farm building at Crossdall – a rural location that is close to the border, between Keady and Middleton – were arrested by Gardai before they had a chance to maim or kill security-force personnel by firing the CWIED on 20 July 1973.⁸⁴⁸ Their colleagues' efforts to shoot the soldiers who came to dismantle this device were also unsuccessful. However, the (better concealed) VOIED did claim the life of one soldier during the clear-operation, Major Richard M. Jarman.⁸⁴⁹

If we could say for certain, that the PIRA were permanently maintaining a presence at the site of these multi-IED attacks up until the point they fired the first device (the CWIED), there might be scope to argue that they were potentially in a position to maintain some degree of control over the outcome during this time – i.e., because they could plausibly take action to warn passers-by to maintain a safe distance from the weapon. It is also plausible to suggest that the PIRA may have assumed that the security force cordon that would be erected around the site in the immediate aftermath of the first explosion – at the same time as they were making their escape from the scene of the crime – would keep civilians away from the VOIED in their absence. However, the fact that civilians ignored both bomb

⁸⁴⁷ 'Soldier Dies From Border Land Mine in Northern Ireland' AP Television, Story no: z022809, 5 May 1973, YouTube, (Recorded 1973), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3NlrWTangNU>, (10/08/2021).

⁸⁴⁸ 14 – 20 July 1973 in 'NIO Summary 1973', TNA, CJ 4/1024.

⁸⁴⁹ Ibid., McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 902.

warnings and police cordons on other occasions suggests that there is no guarantee of a discriminate outcome regardless.

On other occasions the PIRA planted VOIEDs in the derelict properties that, based on the recent movement of soldiers, they expected to be searched for paramilitary weapons – and did so, without issuing a warning ahead of time. The fact that these empty properties could also be the favoured site of children playing hide-and-seek meant that they risked child casualties when they did so. This is evident, for example, by the fact that two children are reported to have narrowly escaped harm when they unwittingly detonated a VOIED that have been left in an understairs cupboard of an unoccupied/derelict house on Sultan Street, in the Falls Road area of Belfast on 9 April 1973, while they were playing a game.⁸⁵⁰

16-year-old Philomena Green from Brownlow Terrance in Lurgan (Co. Armagh) was killed by a VOIED that had been planted without warning in a vacant property on Mary Street on 28 November 1976.⁸⁵¹ It seems reasonable to assume that the reason why the lights in the property had been turned on that day was that the PIRA had hoped that come nightfall, this would attract the attention of either soldiers or police. If so, it is fair to suggest that they had taken this step strategically. However, they had also taken it without considering that in some rare sequence of events, the teenage daughter of the property-owner might prospectively have been the first person to notice the lights, enter the property to

⁸⁵⁰ 'Children Narrowly Escape Explosion', *The Belfast Newsletter*, Monday 9 April 1973, p1; 6- 12 April 1973 in 'NIO Summary 1973', TNA, CJ 4/1024.

⁸⁵¹ Derek Brown, 'Booby traps kill two in Ulster', *The Guardian*, 29 November 1976, p.1; McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 1852.

investigate, trigger and be killed by the VOIED that evening as was sadly to be the case on this occasion.

The PIRA sent victim-operated devices to their targets disguised as letters or parcels which would fire upon opening. This tactic can only produce a discriminate outcome if the parcel is opened by the addressee (its intended target) when they are alone or a sufficient distance away from anyone in the general vicinity. However, it is evident that precisely who, when and where the PIRA's parcel bombs were opened was ultimately never within their control.

The PIRA's letter-bomb campaign could be high-volume and widespread, if not actually successful, in 1973. On 26 September 1973 a parcel addressed to Detective Constable Donald Simpson was received at Omagh RUC station.⁸⁵² The fact that the parcel contained a VOIED inside of a book – *Songs of Percy French* – which would explode upon opening was revealed by an x-ray scan and the weapon was put beyond use. VOIEDs were sent by mail to the home address of soldiers on other occasions. A manilla envelope containing a bomb was sent to an (unnamed and retired) Major-General in Omagh on 27 September 1973.⁸⁵³ It is reported that an ATO was despatched to neutralise the device that was (correctly) suspected to be inside this letter, as well as one that had been sent to a Colonel the following day. The 3 Infantry Brigade HQ commander's diary reported that on 15 May 1973 a letter-bomb disguised as a birthday card was sent to a Hardware Store on Castle Street, Newtownards (Co. Down).⁸⁵⁴ It is not clear from the evidence why the premises was

⁸⁵² 26 September 1973, reference: 14, 'HQ3 Diary, September 73', TNA, WO 305/4217.

⁸⁵³ 27 September 1973, reference: 25, 'HQ3 Diary, September 73', TNA, WO 305/4217.

⁸⁵⁴ 15 May 1973, reference: 13, 'HQ3 Diary May 73', TNA, WO 305/4213.

targeted. It is possible, given the nature of the business, that the owners had rendered services to the security forces and were considered to be 'collaborators' by the PIRA and targeted for this reason. In any case, casualties were avoided on this occasion because the recipient referred the letter to the police who arranged for an ATO to be despatched, after they noticed a suspicious cylinder-shaped object was inside the card. It would have been highly surprising if collateral damage had been avoided, in the scenario that any or all of these letters and parcels had been opened by the persons, and at the premises to which they had been addressed, by the PIRA.

Collateral damage was a serious prospect also, when the PIRA planted VOIEDs in the private homes or vehicles of their targets. There were occasions when the security-force personnel that had been targeted in this manner, was the only person harmed in the attack. Detective-Constable Rolston was killed by a VOIED that, unbeknownst to him, the PIRA had attached to the underside of his vehicle – while it was parked outside his home in County Down, and he had been inside and enjoying a meal with his wife and family, on 15 December 1973.⁸⁵⁵ DC Rolston had been the only person inside the car at the time of the explosion and so collateral damage did not result on this occasion. However, civilian casualties were not avoided when the PIRA used this indiscriminate tactic on other occasions.

In part II of the thesis, we heard that the ten-year-old daughter of part-time UDR lance-corporal was killed along with her father, William Gordon, when the PIRA planted a well-

⁸⁵⁵ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference 977.

concealed VOIED inside of the body work (drivers-side) his car on 8 February 1978.⁸⁵⁶ The evidence suggests that civilian casualties had only been narrowly avoided on other occasions. In November 1977 part-time UDR lieutenant Walter Kerr was sitting warming the engine of his car with barely a minute to spare before he was due to drive his children and the neighbour's child to school – when the PIRA VOIED concealed beneath it exploded.⁸⁵⁷

Civilian casualties were even more likely when a VOIED used by the PIRA was attached to a vehicle parked in a busy, public place at the time of the attack. This is evident in reports of an incident that occurred in Belfast on 11 May 1973. The NIO summary of security events records that on this day a VOIED that had been planted by the PIRA on the underside of a police officer's personal vehicle caused serious injury to two members of the RUC, a (civilian) passenger, and a (civilian) passer-by when it exploded.⁸⁵⁸

Another case in point occurred on 18 May 1973 in Omagh. Five soldiers were ultimately killed (four immediately, one soon afterwards) on this day after a VOIED attached to the car in which they had driven themselves to Knock Na Moe Castle Hotel to attend a dance, exploded.⁸⁵⁹ The fact that the IED was sufficiently powerful to claim the lives of all the soldiers in the car is evident – one of the soldiers is reported to have been hurled 150 yards by the blast.⁸⁶⁰ And, the fact that the weapon also, therefore, placed anyone else who might

⁸⁵⁶ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 1987-1988.

⁸⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, reference: 1975.

⁸⁵⁸ 4 - 10 May 1973 in 'NIO Summary 1973', TNA, CJ 4/1024.

⁸⁵⁹ 18-19 May 1973 in 'HQ3 Diary May 73', TNA, WO 305/4213.

⁸⁶⁰ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 848-851, 865.

otherwise have been in the public carpark at the same time as the soldiers decided to drive away from the hotel in danger, was not lost on the soldiers battalion commander from Lisanelly camp in Omagh who is reported to have said:

This was a very crowded carpark. If the people had come out of the dance five minutes earlier the Abercorn disaster might have paled into insignificance.⁸⁶¹

Indiscriminate Tactics II

Some of the tactics adopted by the PIRA were wholly indiscriminate. They include the planting of bombs or firing of guns in spaces that were occupied by non-combatants without warning.

The incidents of violence discussed in the reckless and discriminate tactics case study sections presented above involved behaviour, on the part of the PIRA, that indicated they had been either unwilling or unable – or both – to use tactics that were likely to result in an effective or discriminate outcome. The wholly indiscriminate tactics discussed in this final case study section are, by contrast, cases when collateral damage was not only a highly likely prospective consequence of the PIRA's actions – it was an almost guaranteed outcome. Moreover, the risk that collateral damage would result when the PIRA employed these tactics was foreseeable (to a reasonable person) and would, therefore, likely have been identified and accepted by the perpetrators ahead of time.

The PIRA used wholly indiscriminate tactics sparingly. One reason the PIRA employed them was to target a high-profile political figure who, in comparison with their other targets, was

⁸⁶¹ 18 - 23 May 1973 in 'NIO Summary 1973', TNA, CJ 4/1024.

less likely to be alone or in a vulnerable position. A notable example of a case when the PIRA employed such tactics during the 1970s was when they killed Lord Louis Mountbatten on 27 August 1979.⁸⁶² The statement they issued in the aftermath of the attack demonstrated that the PIRA had considered him to be a prestigious and symbolic target: not only was he the cousin of Queen Elizabeth II; he was also, the former (and last) British viceroy in India and, therefore, at least in their eyes, an embodiment of British colonial rule:

The British Army acknowledge that after ten years of war it cannot defeat us but yet the British government continue with the oppression of our people and the torture of our comrades in the H-Blocks. Well, for this we will tear out their sentimental, imperialist heart. The death of Mountbatten and the tributes paid to him will be soon in sharp contrast to the apathy of the British government and the English People to the deaths of over three hundred British soldiers, and the deaths of Irish men, women and children at the hands of their forces.⁸⁶³

Elsewhere in the statement, the PIRA described the fatal attack on Mountbatten as ‘a discriminate operation to bring to the attention of the English people the continuing occupation of our country’; but this was highly inaccurate.⁸⁶⁴ The explosion that killed Mountbatten was caused by an IED that was detonated by the PIRA by radio control (an RCIED). The bomb had been planted by them inside his boat, the *Shadow V*, while it had been moored in a small harbour that was local to his holiday-home at Mullaghmore (a coastal village on the Mullaghmore Peninsula in County Sligo, Ireland). Former member of the PIRA Sean O’Callaghan stated in interview that ‘They could have targeted him any time they wanted. [Because] it was an open secret he holidayed there.’⁸⁶⁵ It was also no secret that the retired senior naval officer and diplomat visited the area with his extended family

⁸⁶² Kowalski, ‘The Role of Sectarianism’, p.669.

⁸⁶³ An Phoblacht / Republican News, 1 September 1979, p.2, quoted in Irish Republican Army (IRA) Statement, 1 September 1979, https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/othelem/organ/ira/ira_1979-09-01.htm, (12/06/2022).

⁸⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁵ S. O’Callaghan, personal communication, 27 February 2015.

and was highly unlikely to be alone, ever, while taking a sailing excursion. To the contrary, usually (if not always) Mountbatten sailed the *Shadow V* with members of his family and was accompanied by fifteen-year-old Paul Maxwell, who had taken a summer job working on the boat for Mountbatten. The fact that Maxwell and three of Mountbatten's relatives were killed alongside him would, therefore, have come of no great surprise to the volunteers who planned and executed the attack.⁸⁶⁶

A later example when the PIRA used a wholly indiscriminate tactic to target a high-profile political figure was their attempt against the life of British Prime minister Margaret Thatcher in 1984.⁸⁶⁷ On this occasion the PIRA planted a time-operated IED (TOIED) that was pre-set to fire several weeks ahead of time using an electrical timer they fashioned from video recording technology. The Brighton Bomber, former PIRA volunteer Pat Magee, has made clear in statements and interviews given after the event that, he knew that collateral damage was a likely prospect of his decision to target Thatcher at the Conservative party conference being held at a hotel in Brighton. In other words, he knew that the tactics that were used on this occasion represented a decision he had made which was to sacrifice the lives of hotel guests for the chance to kill the political head of state. Five people – not Thatcher – were killed as a result.⁸⁶⁸

The PIRA can be said to have used wholly indiscriminate tactics also when they planted TOIEDs to target security force in public places without warning. This is evident by the fact

⁸⁶⁶ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 2135,2134,2155.

⁸⁶⁷ Gareth Parry, 'Patrick Magee convicted of IRA terrorist attack', *The Guardian*, 10 June 1986, <https://www.theguardian.com/fromthearchive/story/0,,1235581,00.html>, (12/06/2022), Tom Brady, 'Marine Blast Mirrors IRA Brighton bombing', *Irish Independent*, 27 September 1989, pp.1, 7.

⁸⁶⁸ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 2653-2654, 2661.

that two civilians were killed by TOIED in a van that the PIRA had parked outside of Limavady RUC Station in Derry 28 March 1972 because they had been sitting in their own car and parked close by when it exploded without warning.⁸⁶⁹

No-warning TOIED attacks on military barracks could likewise, pose a significant risk to civilians if the families of soldiers were also housed in them. The van bomb that exploded without warning outside the family living quarters of Lisanelly barracks in Omagh on 9 August 1973 was said to have caused damage to 24 military houses – five of these were reported to have caused ‘severe structural damage’ and were completely uninhabitable as a consequence.⁸⁷⁰ The explosion also caused minor injuries (cuts and bruises) to sixteen civilians (all wives and children of soldiers, one of whom was five months pregnant at the time of the attack) some of whom were said to have experienced minor shock. The fact that fatalities had been avoided on this occasion appears to have had more to do with luck than design on the part of the PIRA. This is because the volunteers involved in the attack had elected to park their van-bomb next to a grass verge – a decision which is reported to have caused much of the force of the explosion to be directed upwards and away from (rather than outwards and towards) the barracks.⁸⁷¹

The 50lbs TOIED the PIRA planted on a coach that was transporting both soldiers and their family members from Manchester to Catterick Camp in Yorkshire on 4 February 1974 demonstrated quite how deadly the PIRA’s wholly indiscriminate tactics could be.⁸⁷² In total,

⁸⁶⁹ Ibid., references: 321-322.

⁸⁷⁰ 9 August 1973 in ‘HQ3 Diary, August 73’; 11- 17 August 1973 in ‘NIO Summary 1973’, TNA, CJ 4/1024.

⁸⁷¹ Ibid.

⁸⁷² Deutsch and Magowan, *Volume 3*, p.13, ‘Red Brigade Claims Bus Bomb Blast’, *Irish News*, 6 Feb 1974, p.1.

eleven people were killed in the blast (eight soldiers, two children and one woman) that occurred, without warning, as the vehicle travelled down the M4 Motorway in England.⁸⁷³

Further examples of wholly indiscriminate tactics occurred later in the same year. The TOIED that exploded without warning at the Horse and Groom pub in Guildford on 5 October 1974 killed four soldiers and had been selected precisely because it was known to be frequented by off-duty military personnel.⁸⁷⁴ The Kings Arms in Woolwich was targeted with the same tactic soon after (7 November 1974) for the same reason, and five soldiers lost their lives as a result.⁸⁷⁵ The fact that civilians would also be drinking in or working at these premises at the time the shrapnel-filled devices exploded seems to have been of little concern to the PIRA volunteers involved. The fact that one civilian was killed and 57 injured in the Guildford attack, and one civilian (barman Alan Horsley) was killed and 21 injured in the attack at Woolwich stand testament to the fact that tactics involved in both incidents did not in any measure discriminate between targets and non-targets (the fact that the soldiers who were killed were off-duty is, of course, an also highly contentious fact).

The PIRA used wholly indiscriminate attacks to target civilians on some occasions. On 12 November 1975 the PIRA killed one civilian and injured fifteen when they threw a bomb into Scott's Oyster Bar in Mount Street in Mayfair (central London).⁸⁷⁶ The same London-based group of PIRA volunteers – who were later to become known as the 'Balcombe Street Gang' – threw a ball-bearing packed bomb through the window of Walton's Restaurant (located

⁸⁷³ McKittrick et al., *Lost Lives*, references: 1052-1062, A6.

⁸⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 1226-1227.

⁸⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, references: 1198;1199;1200;1201;1202.

⁸⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, reference: 1522.

on Walton Street, Chelsea) on 18 November 1975; two civilians were killed and 17 injured as a result.⁸⁷⁷ The fact that the actions and reactions of others in the general vicinity of PIRA operations were fundamentally outside the PIRA's control, even in this kind of scenario, was evident on 12 October 1973 after Raymond McAdam (a Catholic) died from the injuries he received in the process of attempting to save the life of the Protestant who owned the shop opposite his home in Annaghmore (Glebe, Newtownbutler, Co. Fermanagh) after he witnessed the PIRA lob a bomb into the premises from a passing car.⁸⁷⁸

The PIRA tended to avoid using such tactics the vast majority of the time and especially in Northern Ireland. However, for reasons outlined in part I, the PIRA would sometimes use wholly indiscriminate tactics to mimic those employed by protestant paramilitaries. These include no-warning bomb attacks on bars that were known to be frequented primarily (or exclusively) by loyalist paramilitaries and Protestant civilians.

Conclusions: The Consequences of the Armed Struggle

If we examine the types of weapons and tactics that the PIRA decided to combine to attack different targets in different spaces we can glean further insight regarding the degree of risk the PIRA were willing to take, and the extent to which those risks contributed to the manifestation of undesired outcomes, including collateral damage and 'own goals' subsequently.

⁸⁷⁷ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 1446, 1526.

⁸⁷⁸ The PIRA vehemently denied involvement in the attack and blamed the UFF. The PIRA are believed to have been culpable, however, based on the nature of the target and the similarities between this incident and other attacks the PIRA had been involved in at the time. McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 947.

The data that was collected for this study reveals insights that bolster these claims. Analysis of the weapons, tactics, and environment that was involved in each fatal incident of PIRA violence that occurred between 1969 and 1979 reveals patterns that indicate correlation between factors or suggest causation. Familiarity with the qualitative primary source material that underpins that data allows the author to also identify exceptions to the rule which can provide a richer picture of the armed struggle and its consequences.

Figure 4.2 represents the breakdown of fatalities resulting from PIRA violence in this period by the category of tactic that had been involved (discriminate, reckless or indiscriminate). It reveals that most fatalities resulted from PIRA operations that had involved a reckless or indiscriminate tactic. However, as the case studies presented above demonstrate, the type of tactic that was used by the PIRA does not always determine the outcome that will result from their operations and can in fact be a wholly inadequate explanation for why a fatality resulted.

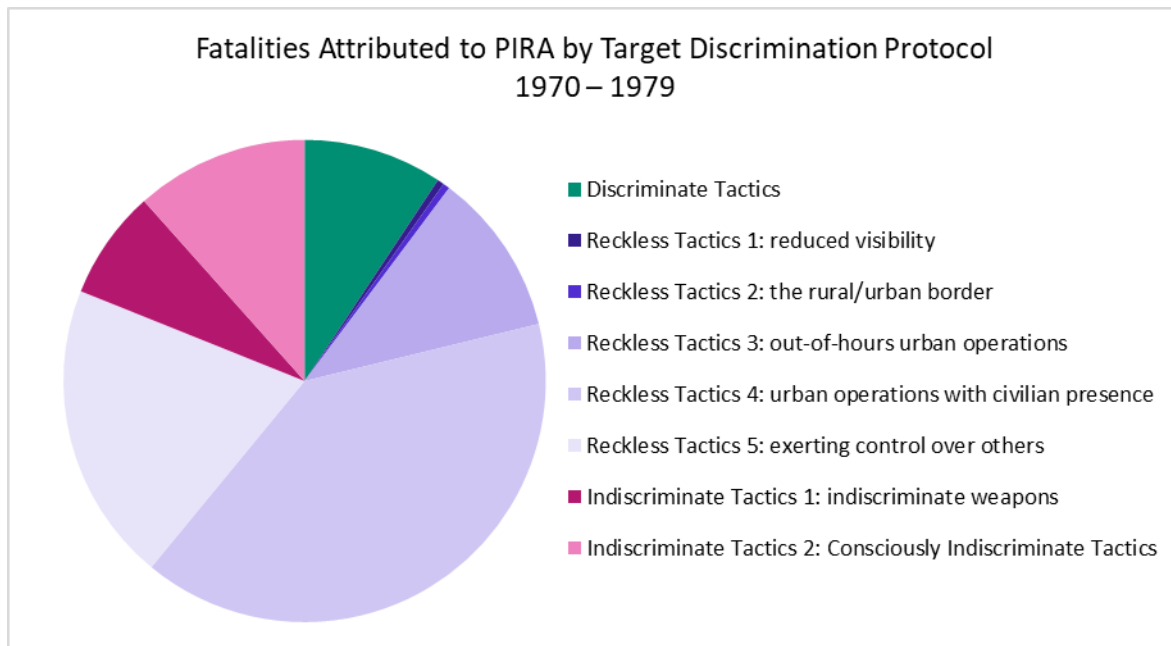


Figure 4.2 Fatalities Attributed to PIRA by Target Discrimination Protocol 1970 – 1979.
 Source: Kowalski, DPhil Dataset.

The data reveals that the PIRA used reckless and indiscriminate targeting protocols on a regular basis throughout the armed struggle, with and without fatalities resulting as a *direct* consequence. Almost 20% of all fatalities attributed to PIRA between 1970 and 1979 resulted from incidents when the PIRA used tactics that involved exerting control over others including demanding they respond to instructions to evacuate the premises they targeted with IEDs, hostage-taking or hijacking. These are tactics that, among other things, depend on the actions and reactions of others being predictable to succeed. The fact that there is never any guarantee that this will be the case was evident in the case studies presented above (in Reckless Tactics: part V): warnings were ignored, people fought back, and civilian casualties occurred as a result. Six civilians were killed when they took steps to thwart the endeavours of PIRA volunteers to hijack their vehicle or hold them under duress

during a robbery or assassination in this period,⁸⁷⁹ and five civilians were killed because they disbelieved a bomb warning or disregarded it in a bid to save others.⁸⁸⁰ However, most of the fatalities that resulted in the cases that make up this 20% did not result as a direct consequence of a control-dependent tactics. In fact, it was more common for there to be no fatalities at all resulting when these tactics were employed by the PIRA – which rich sources of evidence (such as the periodic summaries of security events compiled by the security forces) report was regularly and in high volume throughout this decade.

The PIRA were more often able to hijack cars without resistance from the owners. Accounts of former volunteers indicate that this is because the drivers they targeted were too frightened to refuse the PIRA's request or disobey their orders to refrain from reporting the incident to the police.⁸⁸¹ Sean O'Callaghan, a former volunteer, and later informer against the organisation, recalls the ease with which he was able to 'lift' the vehicle that he used on the day he assassinated an RUC officer in a busy public house in 1974:

I approached the owner of the garage, identified myself as a volunteer and told him we were 'borrowing' one of his cars. He was too frightened to resist. We filled the car with petrol and warned him that he was not to report this to the police for several hours. We knew that he would do as he was told.⁸⁸²

Likewise, most incidents where PIRA bomb attacks involved the bomb warning tactic and required civilians to be evacuated to be discriminate, resulted in no fatalities whatsoever.

One way of interpreting this finding would be to suggests that part of the reason that

⁸⁷⁹ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 908, 987, 1785, 1984, 2131, 603.

⁸⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, references: 226, 1030, 1136, 1785, 1853.

⁸⁸¹ Civilians were too afraid to refuse the PIRA's demands to use their vehicles and property for example, in December 1973 in the case we now know would be the abduction and killing of Thomas Niedermayer. Knox, *The Killing*, pp.219-223.

⁸⁸² O'Callaghan, *The Informer*, p.107.

civilian casualties did not result more commonly from PIRA violence was that the steps they took to limit civilian casualties (including the issuing of bomb warnings) worked more often than they didn't. However, another credible way to interpret the finding would be to say that casualties were often avoided because civilians and security-force personnel in Northern Ireland became familiar with PIRA tactics over time and would respond in ways that effectively save their own lives, despite the significant and immediate danger in which they were placed. Support in favour of the latter argument can be found by examining the outcome of the PIRA's bombing campaign in England.

The PIRA bombing campaign in England was, by comparison, less prevalent and consistent than their activity in Northern Ireland by some measure. Gary McGladdery's research into the PIRA bombing campaign in England shows that fatalities were produced at a much higher rate per incident of violence perpetrated by republican paramilitaries in England than in Northern Ireland: 234 bombing incidents and 10 shooting attacks perpetrated by republican paramilitaries (OIRA & PIRA) in England between 1973 and 1975 produced 39 civilian fatalities and 17 security force fatalities; 50 bombing attacks and two shooting attacks perpetrated by the PIRA in England between 1976 and 1988 resulted in 15 civilian fatalities and 13 security force casualties; and the 204 explosions and four shooting attacks attributed to the PIRA in England between 1989 and 1997 the PIRA were responsible for which caused 11 Civilian and 14 security force fatalities.⁸⁸³ It is possible that the lower intensity of the conflict in England affected these results for McGladdery also finds that bomb warnings of much longer durations issued in England – including the 90 minutes

⁸⁸³ Tables 2-6 in McGladdery, *The Provisional IRA*, pp.226-229.

advance warning of the Canary Wharf attack on 9 February 1996 – could prove insufficient to evacuate civilians and save lives.⁸⁸⁴

More often, fatalities resulted from PIRA attacks because the bomb-warning tactic or some other element of their bombing operation was bungled by the perpetrator: 79 civilian fatalities resulted from 21 incidents when PIRA bomb warnings were inaccurate or delivered late (see figure 4.3) – making this the most common and most deadly cause of collateral damage during the PIRA campaign.

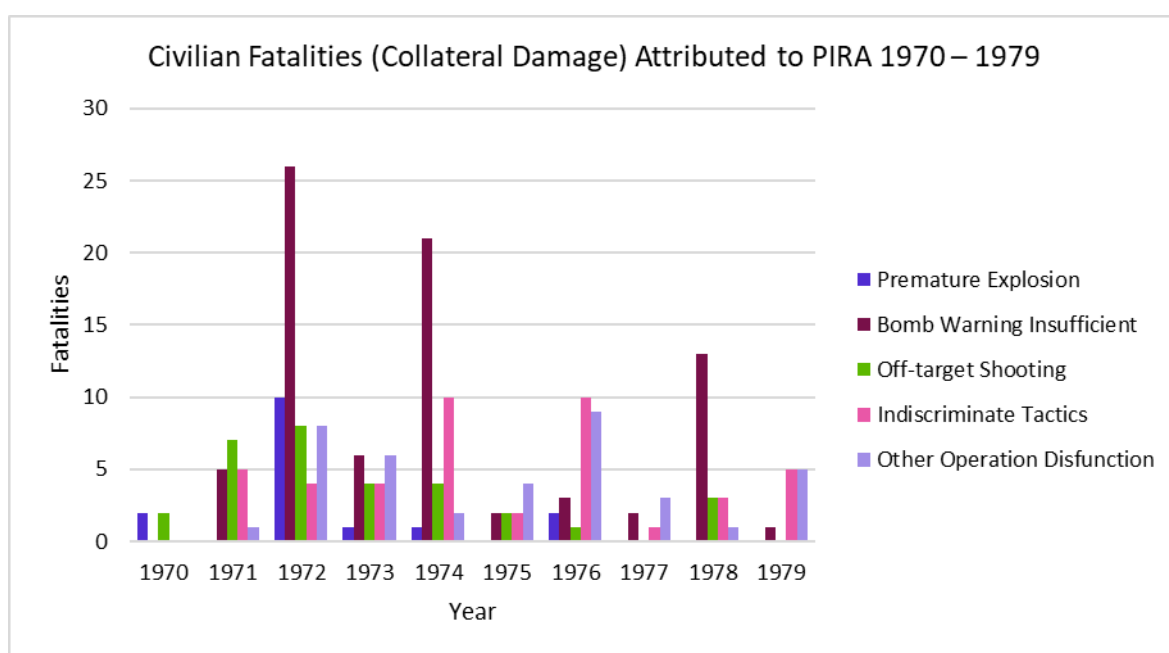


Figure 4.3 Civilian Fatalities (Collateral Damage) Attributed to PIRA 1970 – 1979.
Source: Kowalski, DPhil Dataset.

The premature explosion of PIRA IEDs – i.e., inefficient weapons manufacture or usage on the part of the PIRA – was the second most common cause of collateral damage. The annual

⁸⁸⁴ Ibid., pp.192-193.

number of civilian casualties resulting from premature explosions (represented in purple in figure 4.3) decreases dramatically over time – most occurred in 1972. To some extent this can be explained by the fact that PIRA weapons became more reliable over time. However, when we examine PIRA operations in detail we see a variety of behaviours and choices that contradict the simplicity of this interpretation. For example, when we find examples of the PIRA returning to weapons and tactics that had previously proven dangerous later in their campaign, despite their having other alternatives available by that time.

The PIRA bombers that attempted to strike at the headquarters of a loyalist paramilitary organisation on the Shankill Road in Belfast in 1993 (which was located above Frizzell's fish shop), for example, must have been wise to the fact the type of device that they were about to use, a short-fused bomb,⁸⁸⁵ had proven dangerously unstable on other occasions.⁸⁸⁶ The scene of devastation that was created by the blast of the weapon as it exploded prematurely, killing nine Protestant civilians and one of the two PIRA bomb-planters, was certainly reminiscent of earlier scenes such as the wrecked Red Lion pub on the Ormeau Road in South Belfast, targeted by the PIRA on 2 November 1971 in a recklessly negligent bid to inflict damage on the adjacent Ballynafeigh RUC Station, killing three civilians.⁸⁸⁷ These tragedies testify to the fact that the outcome of PIRA operations was, crucially, subject to both the organisation's capacity and willingness to operate with precision. They also provide an interesting challenge to the argument that the

⁸⁸⁵ This is an igniferously-initiated time-operated IED.

⁸⁸⁶ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 3418-3427; Ardoyne Commemoration Project, *Ardoyne: The Untold Truth* (Belfast, 2002), pp.400-401.

⁸⁸⁷ McKittrick *et. al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 170-172; *The Daily Mirror*, 3 November 1971, p.1.

PIRA campaign 'matured' over time,⁸⁸⁸ which would be the logical way to interpret the patterns which emerge from less complex data.

The fact that the PIRA continued to use risk-intense tactics and indiscriminate weapons throughout the period, even after they had resulted in civilian casualties, indicates that that they were willing to compromise the safety of civilians in the pursuit of their goals – or in other words, were willing to risk the prospect that their actions could produce collateral damage. Based on his oral history interview-based research, Bowyer-Bell concluded that the PIRA were broadly aware of the risks involved and willing to take this gamble:

Too many bomb targets seemed obviously to ensure great civilian risk.... Within the [P]IRA the consensus was that there was no alternative but to risk innocent lives if the armed struggle was to continue.⁸⁸⁹

31 civilian fatalities resulted during 29 shooting attacks due to ricochet or off-target bullets being fired by the PIRA.⁸⁹⁰ The fact that these deaths occurred is unsurprising, given the perpetrators had been willing to use firearms in populated, urban, or residential spaces. On the other hand, it could be argued that for this very reason it is surprising that so few of the PIRA's urban shooting attacks claimed the lives of those other than the intended target given how regularly fired high velocity rounds at soldiers who patrolled residential or public spaces on foot or in militarised vehicles; and conducted ambush attacks in similar spaces using pistols, assault rifles and even submachine guns. Including when they were on the move. Skilled marksmanship will have played a role in determining this outcome on some of

⁸⁸⁸ Patrick Finnegan, 'Professionalization of a Nonstate Actor: A Case Study of the Provisional IRA', *Armed Forces & Society*, 45/2, (2019), pp.353-356.

⁸⁸⁹ Bowyer Bell, *Targets and Tactics*, p.87.

⁸⁹⁰ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references:29-30, 119, 155, 184, 187-188, 190, 225, 272, 324, 347, 386, 473, 482, 542, 858, 922, 960, 961, 989, 1183, 1197, 1426, 1508, 1858, 1985, 2007, 2052, 443, 1003.

the occasions when civilians were in the vicinity of the attack. But it was actions that were taken by civilians, instinctively, to remove themselves out of the line of fire that saved lives on other occasions.

The PIRA placed local civilians at significant risk when they fired their guns at moving vehicles in busy urban or residential streets. This is because, even if they manage to avoid killing or injuring civilians directly – their actions could set of a sequence of events that does. The PIRA does not appear to have caused any civilian fatalities in this period as an indirect result of their deciding to shoot the driver of a moving vehicle that could go on to collide with people, property, or other vehicles consequently.⁸⁹¹ But witness testimonies at the inquest in the death of off-duty UDR Corporal Cecil Grills – who the PIRA shot as he drove through the Newry on 12 January 1978 – demonstrates that they were willing to onboard the risks associated with using this tactic during busy rush hour traffic.⁸⁹²

The indiscriminate character of the VOIEDs used by the PIRA have been explored in detail in part II and part III of this thesis. In light of this information, it might be surprising that collateral damage was caused by them on so few occasions. During the 1970s a total of 57

⁸⁹¹ There are several incidents when vehicles go out of control because the driver was shot by the PIRA. Including, for instance, on 15 March 1983 when the PIRA shot and killed RUCR Frederick Morton. McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 2525; Collins, *Killing Rage*, p.150. The tragic case of the Maguire children – who were died from injuries sustained when a vehicle, that was driven by a member of the PIRA, went out of control after the driver was shot by a soldier on the Finaghy Road North (Belfast) on 10 August 1976. 'Post Mortem Report relating to the death of Andrew Maguire who died 10 August 1976.', PRONI, BELF/6/1/1/41/94A; 'Post Mortem Report relating to the death of Joanne Maguire who died 10 August 1976.', PRONI, BELF/6/1/1/41/95A; 'Post Mortem Report relating to the death of John Maguire who died at the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast. Date of death: 11 August 1976.', PRONI, BELF/6/1/1/41/97A.

⁸⁹² 'Coroner's Inquest relating to the death of Cecil Austin Grills who died at Daisy Hill Hospital, Newry, Co Down. Date of death: 12 January 1978.', PRONI, ARM/6/1/1/31/26A.

security force fatalities resulted during 44 separate incidents when the PIRA had used VOIEDs and 21 civilian fatalities (categorised as collateral damage) resulted from fifteen other incidents involving these weapons.⁸⁹³ These fatal VOIED attacks include eleven cases when the VOIEDs the PIRA attached to the personal vehicles of security-force personnel claimed lives – fourteen were killed in total, thirteen were off-duty members of the security forces,⁸⁹⁴ and one was a civilian passenger.⁸⁹⁵ Nineteen of the security force fatalities that resulted from VOIEDs were killed by devices that had been planted in properties that were derelict or vacant the time⁸⁹⁶ – only three civilians were killed in the same scenario in this period.⁸⁹⁷ Finally, 23 members of the security forces and eleven civilians were killed when VOIEDS were planted by the PIRA in vehicles, or disguised as other ordinary objects, and left in a public spaces.⁸⁹⁸

Many more VOIEDs were planted by the PIRA in this period which either failed to function or were found and neutralised by the security forces without fatalities. This tells us that the PIRA's endeavours to lure the security forces towards these devices, or warn civilians to stay clear of them, worked more often than they didn't. It also tells us that even though the PIRA planted VOIEDs in both public and private spaces, these did not prove to be locations where it became common for collateral damage to result. This may indicate that the pre-operation

⁸⁹³ Kowalski, DPhil Dataset.

⁸⁹⁴ McKittrick et al., *Lost Lives*, references: 674, 848-851, 865, 977, 1014, 1038, 1766, 1809, 1864, 1871, 1975, 1987.

⁸⁹⁵ Ibid., reference:1988.

⁸⁹⁶ Ibid., references: 407-409, 658, 675-676, 855-856, 880-881, 1067, 1153, 1297, 2016, 2105, 2192, 1593-1594.

⁸⁹⁷ Ibid., references: 842, 1634, 1852.

⁸⁹⁸ Ibid., references: (security force) 733-734, 394, 40-41, 474, 524, 1277, 1449, 1497, 1528, 1680-1682, 1869, 2009, 946, 122, 931, 1203, 1298, 1407, 1651, (civilians): 572, 598, 1025, 1029, 779, 935, 1074, 1136, 1610-1611, 1758, 1853.

reconnaissance the PIRA was known to conduct with a view to identifying the best way to attack a particular target, may also have involved observing the way that public and private spaces were used with a view to identify targets that had a lower chance of collateral damage occurring than others – such considerations have been found to factor in the pre-operation planning of others that perpetrate acts of political violence.⁸⁹⁹

In part I it was argued that the armed struggle could be affected when critical details of their operation, such as the type of weapon or tactic involved, were misreported by the media. The example that was given in support of this argument was the incorrect reports that Corporal Elliot had been tortured (as well as killed) by the PIRA in 1971. This case is also an example where the type of weapon that had been used by the PIRA has been misreported. Most reports of the incident suggest that the victim's corpse was attached to a VOIED, but this turns out not to have been the case. Explosives were certainly involved, but the IED was a command-wire device (CWIED) and not, therefore, designed to be triggered when the deceased body of the UDR corporal was eventually discovered and moved.⁹⁰⁰ Records of this disposal operation recorded in the log of security events for the day show that this was confirmed within approximately one hour of the ATO arriving at the scene. The first update from the ATO read 'Body on Border was NOT booby trapped'.⁹⁰¹ And the ATO report completed at the end of the disposal operation noted 'They are nothing but animals using a

⁸⁹⁹ Hemmingby and Bjørge, *The Dynamics*, pp.44-46.

⁹⁰⁰ The PIRA had in fact laid a command-wire device approximately 70 to 100 yards away from the corporal's body: a culvert had been packed with six oil drums that contained approximately 500lb of explosives. This was connected with wires to six further Claymore devices which each held 5-10lbs of explosives. HQ Northern Ireland, 17-19 April, 'HQNI Diary, April – May 72', TNA, WO 305/4199; PRONI, BELF/6/1/1/37/62.

⁹⁰¹ Ibid.

body to lure troops on top of a command type bomb.’⁹⁰² Still the idea that this was a VOIED quickly worked its way into the contemporary accounts of the incident, and subsequently into the secondary literature.⁹⁰³ In this sense, Two (not one) critically important aspects of the circumstances in which Corporal Elliot was killed seem to have been misreported to the detriment of the PIRA. However, these revelations are not likely to fundamentally alter public opinion of the episode – for the correct version of events (where Corporal Elliot was not tortured and not attached to a VOIED, but was kidnapped, held for at least a day, shot, and finally, left by a CWIED) is grim regardless.

On other occasions, misreported – or unreported – details of PIRA operations produced an incorrect account of their activity that was, if anything, more favourable to them. The 1975 Forkhill ambush has been commonly characterised as an attack demonstrative of the PIRA executing violence with deadly precision. However, it seems that this is a mischaracterisation of the event that has likely emerged in relation to the outcome of the attack – four security force fatalities – as opposed to the way that it was executed by the PIRA in 1976.⁹⁰⁴ Under closer inspection, the actions taken by the PIRA on the day (which were discussed previously, in part I and part II of the thesis) would be better described as opportunistic for several reasons. Firstly, because the perpetrator was spotted running to

⁹⁰² Senior Ammunition Technical Officer, EOD Branch Northern Ireland, ‘Report No. 5053 EIRE/IED/HOAX/FALSE SEARCH/FIND/STRAY’, 19 April 72, in MOD, FOI responses released 14 January 2019, ‘Information regarding murder of Cpl James Elliott 1972’, FOI 2018/06314, 26 July 2018, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/762936/06314.pdf, (08/02/2021).

⁹⁰³ For instance, the authors of *Lost Lives* note that write: ‘The booby-trap was set so that the bomb would go off if the body was moved.’ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, reference: 341.

⁹⁰⁴ Harnden, *Bandit Country*, pp.78-79; Smith, *3-2-1 Bomb Gone*, p.121; 17-30 July 1975 in ‘NIO Summary 1974-1975’, TNA, CJ 4/1787; Barzilay, Volume 2, pp.236-239; R v Thompson, *Northern Ireland Law Reports* (1977), NI 74.

and captured driving from the attack. Secondly, because the soldiers who ultimately came within fatal proximity of a CWIED that the PIRA had dug into the side of a road did so because they had come to investigate a suspicious object – a milk churn – that was identified close, but not sufficiently close to the CWIED that it was certain that it had been a ‘come-on’ for the attack as opposed to an incidental and unconnected item. Finally, the PIRA were not positioned at the firing point ahead of time – it was only after hearing the sound of their helicopter landing that the volunteer became aware that they had a potential opportunity to use the CWIED to target the soldiers.

Another case where misreported details of the weapons and tactics used by the PIRA have painted a picture of PIRA activity which was more favourable to them, is the two-stage PIRA bomb attack at Narrow Water (Co. Armagh) that resulted in the death of 18 soldiers on 27 August 1979. It is commonly reported that the attack involved two radio-controlled IEDs (RCIEDs), and it is sometimes – but not always reported – that a civilian was shot and killed by the army in the confusion that followed.⁹⁰⁵ However, the evidence actually suggests that the second device was activated by radio control, but ultimately fired by a mechanical timer after a pre-set time-delay (i.e., it was a TOIED),⁹⁰⁶ and that civilians had been relatively

⁹⁰⁵ ‘The Troubles’ blog post of the National Army Museum website, for example does not mention a civilian was killed. The text simply reads: ‘In August 1979, the PIRA killed 18 soldiers from the [Parachute Regiment](#) and the [Queen’s Own Highlanders](#) in an ambush at Warrenpoint near the Irish border.’ <https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/troubles-1969-2007>, (15/09/2021).

⁹⁰⁶ In the 1999 publication *Bandit Country*, Toby Harnden concludes, by contrast, that the second device in fact had a two-stage firing system: ‘a radio signal was sent to a Macgregor receiver/decoder to arm the device and trigger the firing switch, a memo-park (mechanical) timer that would complete the electrical circuit, allow power to flow to the initiator and detonate the device – after the pre-determined period of time (30 minutes, on this occasion) had elapsed’. This account was informed by intelligence reports and other documents produced during the criminal investigation that followed the 27 August 1979 ambush, which were made available to Harnden between 1998 and 1999, as well as confidential interviews by Harnden. Harnden, *Bandit Country*, pp.199-200; Personal Communication with Mr Toby Harden, 25 October 2021; With thanks to Mr Toby Harden, for making copies of the following documents from their private collection available to the

close by and slightly injured during both explosions.⁹⁰⁷ Both of these details are critical to our assessment of the PIRA's tactics on the day because they determine that the incident is outside the parameters used, by the author, to describe discriminate tactics and that the Narrow Water Massacre must, therefore, be categorised as an operation that used reckless (if not wholly indiscriminate) tactics. This is because we know that if the PIRA had a clear view of the road when they detonated the first RCIED – they did so in the knowledge that civilians were close by. We also know that if, by contrast, the volunteers that fired this RCIED did so in a scenario where their view of the site where the explosion was going to occur was impaired to some degree (for instance, because of the grassy vegetation we know surrounded the spot where they lay to fire the bomb) – they did so in the knowledge that they were not fully able to confirm that civilians were not present. In any case, we can say that the PIRA had been willing to leave the fate of any civilians unfortunate enough to be present when the second IED (the TOIED) exploded to chance because it had been set to fire

author (25/10/2021): 'INC/203 - Statement by Capt B Barber RAMC', 29/08/1979; 'INTREP from 3 UDR', 30/08/1979; 'INTREP from 1 QO HLDERS – Warrenpoint Update 30 August', 30/08/1979; 'INTREP from 3 INF BDE', 31/08/1979; 'INTREP to 3 INF BDE – Arrest by RUC Warrenpoint', 31/08/1979; 'INTREP from 1 QO HLDERS - Warrenpoint Update 31 August 1979', 31/08/1979; 'INTREP by 1 QO HLDERS – INTREP Warrenpoint Massacre 27 Aug 1979', 31/08/1979; 'INTREP From 3 UDR – Ref Our UAA Dated 301245Z Aug. More Snippets', 31/08/1979; 'INTREP1 QO HLDERS – Warrenpoint Update 2 SEPT', 02/09/1979; 'INTREP from 1 QO HLDERS - Warrenpoint Update 06 Sep 79', 06/09/1979; 'INCREP Two No.9_from 1 QO HLDERS – Warrenpoint RCIED Ambush 27 Aug 1979', 07/09/1979; 'INTREP from 1 QO HLDERS – Warrenpoint Follow Up 14 Sep 79', 14/09/1979; 'INTREP from 3 INF BDE – HQNI Republic INTREP', 17/09/1979; 'CID Preliminary Report on Narrow Water Massacre', 09/10/1979; 'INTREP from 1 QO HLDERS – Warrenpoint Follow Up', 12/10/1979; 'INTREP from 1 QO HLDERS – Information from Garda', 12/10/1979; 'Report by Maj AF Ridger – Trailer Used in Warrenpoint Murders – 27 Aug 79', 11/11/1979.

⁹⁰⁷ A disposition given on 27 June 1980 by a (civilian) local resident of Portadown places themselves next to a car that was parked 'in front of a flat bodied lorry and a lorry carrying bales of hay and parked at a litter bin at the end of the layby' - i.e., next to the vehicle that housed the first IED (the RCIED). Another civilian witness deposition states that they were present (in their van) at the scene when the second blast occurred and that they were injured by rocks falling all around. Both witness testimonies can be corroborated by other evidence including photos of the scene of both explosions in journalist David Barzilay's fourth volume, and a note that 'three civilians were also injured during the explosions but not seriously' reported in the Monthly Bulletin of Security Statistics for August 1979. See: 'Coroner's Inquest relating to the deaths....at Narrow Water, Warrenpoint, County Down. Date of deaths: 27 August 1979', 8 July 1980, DOW/6/1/1/57/26A, Public Record Office for Northern Ireland (PRONI); David Barzilay, *Volume 4*, pp.80-103; Northern Ireland Office, 'Monthly Bulletin of Security Statistics, for August 1979', 26 September 1979, TNA, CJ4-2915.

automatically and ahead of time by volunteers who did not stick around to observe the final outcome.⁹⁰⁸

The Forkhill ambush and the Narrow Water Massacre have one thing in common: they are both examples of times when the PIRA killed multiple soldiers in a single attack. For this reason, the military and the government would have had incentive to portray the assaults as examples when the PIRA had demonstrated a rare and exceptional capacity to apply lethal force. Two case studies would be a wholly inadequate sample of evidence on which to claim this is a pattern, or the actual cause of the misreporting on these occasions. However, they do provide compelling evidence in support of the argument that certain elements of any paramilitary operation can prove critical to our interpretation of it, or a significant obstacle to our understanding of it if they have been misreported.

Finally, it is worth reflecting on the merits of the methodological approach adopted to conduct this investigation into the first ten years of the PIRA campaign. One of the primary conclusions we can draw from these research findings is that it can be important to examine incidents of political violence in micro-level detail, so that we can better understand the data and the subject it represents. The variation that exists between the incidents in which civilian casualties resulted is a good example of why this is the case.

⁹⁰⁸ The volunteers responsible were caught making their escape on a moped by the Gardai at the same time the second IED exploded.

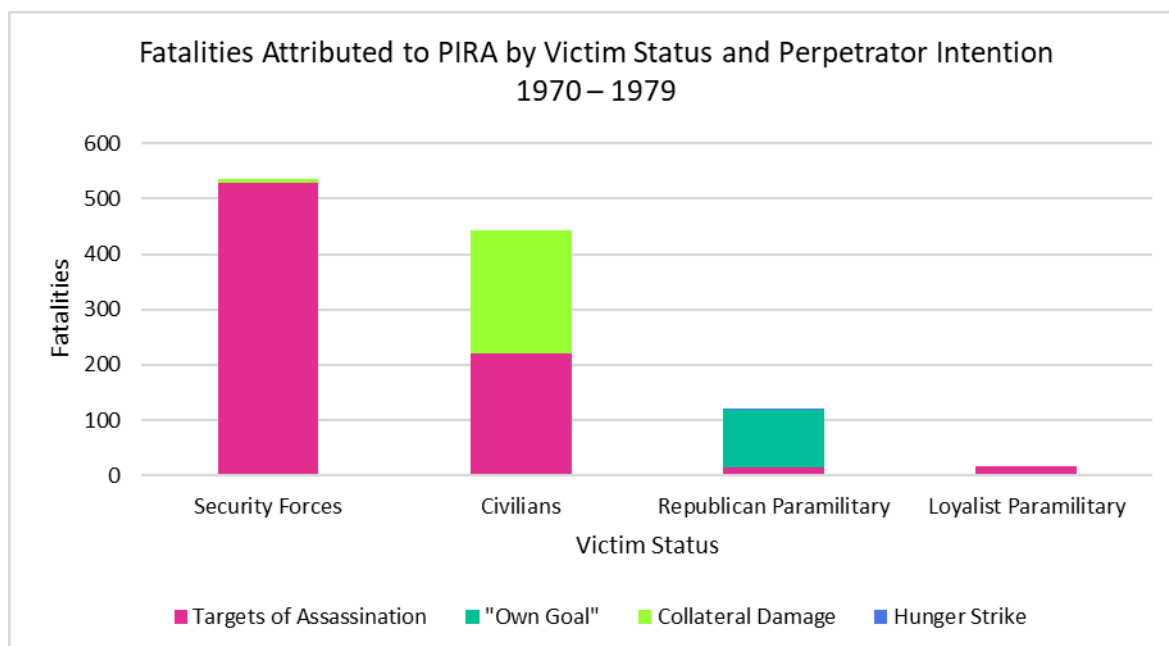


Figure 4.4 Fatalities Attributed to PIRA by Victim Status and Perpetrator Intention 1970 – 1979.

Source: Kowalski, DPhil Dataset.

Civilians were killed for a lot of different reasons. The fact that almost half of all civilian casualties (47%) can be categorised as collateral damage means that it is important to disaggregate this data from targeted assassinations (including sectarian assassinations). Failure to do so can be misleading, for example: If we try to assess change over time, from data which does not differentiate targeted assassinations from collateral damage our results could be distorted.

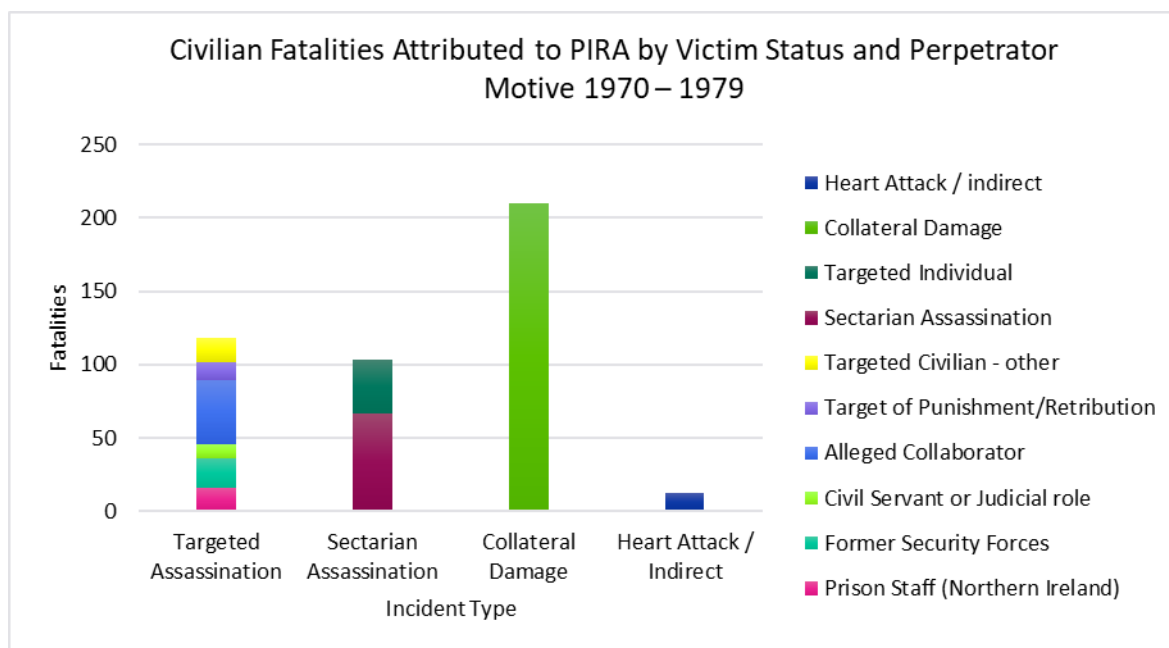


Figure 4.5 Civilian Fatalities Attributed to PIRA by Perpetrator Motive 1970 – 1979.
Source: Kowalski, DPhil Dataset.

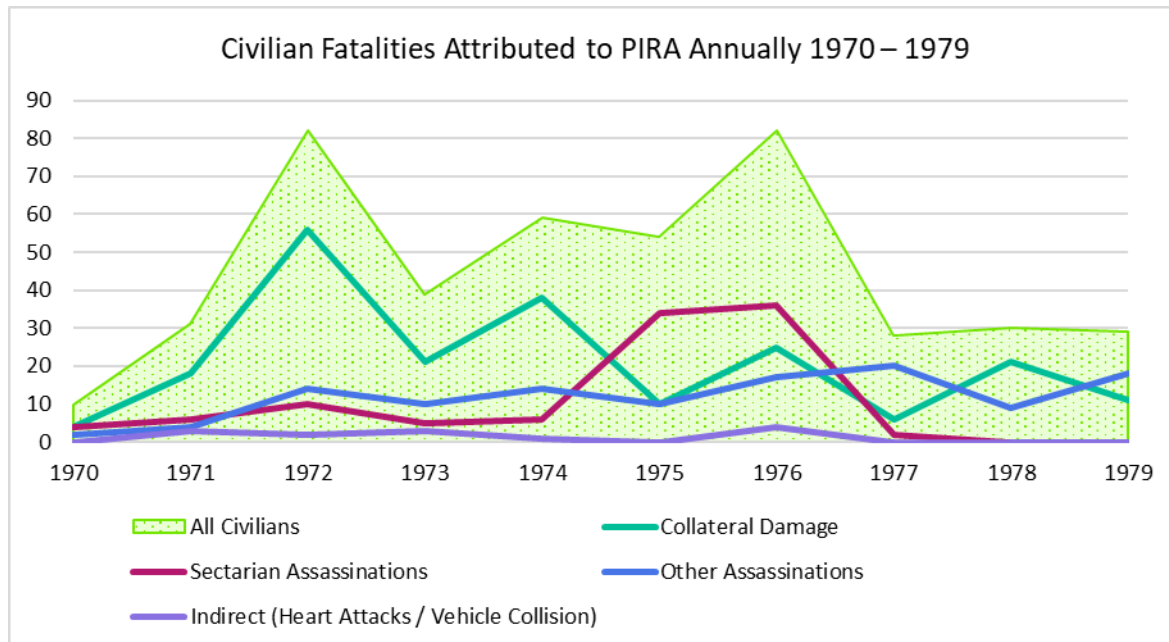


Figure 4.6 Civilian Fatalities Attributed to PIRA Annually 1970 – 1979.
Source: Kowalski, DPhil Dataset.

Figure 4.6 demonstrates that the targeted assassination of civilians for their alleged engagement in informing or collusion was a small but persistent feature of the armed struggle in the 1970s (as represented by the blue line). By contrast, sectarian assassinations (red line) were politically contentious and, for the most part, actively avoided. Sectarian assassinations most commonly occurred in direct responses to the assassination of Catholic civilians by loyalist paramilitaries and were mainly contained to the years between 1973 and 1977 for this reason. Collateral damage (teal line) was politically detrimental to the PIRA campaign and, to some extent, a phenomenon that the PIRA actively avoided. The organisation could, and to some extent did, learn from their errors or moderate their behaviour in line with how it was portrayed in the media and interpreted by others, and the annual total of civilian casualties that can be categorised as collateral damage decreases after 1972 for this reason. However, this decline will only become apparent if the data we use for quantitative analysis of the PIRA campaign distinguishes between civilian casualties that resulted from targeted assassinations and collateral damage, because it will become masked by the uplift in sectarian assassinations in the middle of the decade.

Another important conclusion pertains to context. The rich sources of evidence examined for this study demonstrate that the total volume of PIRA operations far exceeds those which proved fatal. The fortnightly summaries of security of events compiled by the Northern Ireland Office demonstrates, for example, that in the first two weeks of April 1974 the volume of non-fatal PIRA activity far outweighs the two incidents of violence which proved fatal.⁹⁰⁹ In the fortnight, the PIRA killed two individuals in separate targeted assassination

⁹⁰⁹ 30 March - 10 April 1974 in 'NIO Summary 1974-1975', TNA, CJ 4/1787.

attacks;⁹¹⁰ but they had intended to claim the lives of many others (unsuccessfully) and perpetrated other violence which (successfully) avoided incurring casualties. The report states that shooting incidents averaged 14 per day: there were 27 bomb explosions, incendiary attacks on 38 separate premises, and a further 16 explosive devices were neutralised. It is noted that 'The Provisionals were probably responsible for 24 of the bomb explosions and all of the incendiaries', but that almost all of their attacks against security force personnel had been 'ineffective'. A large amount of commercial targeting is also reported to have occurred – causing material damage to buildings and infrastructure – which the report states was 'designed to gain publicity and to damage public morale and confidence'.⁹¹¹ By comparison, the three bombing attacks attributed to Loyalists involved no-warning explosions inside of bars which killed 20 and injured a further two Catholic civilians on 29 March, in addition to two Protestants in a bar in Sandy Row the next day when it exploded prematurely.

South Armagh became known as 'Bandit Country' because of the high toll of security force casualties that resulted from there. The PIRA campaign in this region is also commonly associated (in the mid-1970s) with sectarian assassinations. The region did experience the lion's share of this element of the PIRA campaign but sources which report the full extent to which the PIRA pursued the security forces in this area (including fatal and non-fatal attacks) suggests this was the preoccupation of the PIRA, locally. The RUC-Garda Co-coordinating Committee Report on South Armagh from February 1976 paints a different picture of the

⁹¹⁰ An off-duty soldier and a former member of the UDR were shot by PIRA on 8 and 10 April 1974, respectively: McKittrick *et. al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 1065-1066.

⁹¹¹ *Ibid.*

armed struggle including a significant amount of non-fatal activity and a focus on security force and commercial targets.⁹¹² According to the report, between 1973 and 1978 the PIRA were very active in the region, and the majority of their activity was directed against security-force personnel or commercial targets.⁹¹³ It is reported that the PIRA's main pursuits included the firing of high-velocity weapons at the Northern security forces from tactically placed positions in the border, and use of command detonation explosives against commercial and military targets.⁹¹⁴ For instance, six trains were hit as commercial targets by the PIRA in the 13 month study (January 1975 – February 1976).⁹¹⁵ And, between 1973 and 1978, there were so many large scale and well-orchestrated attacks on security force vehicles that the RUC suggested limiting vehicle movement in the area.⁹¹⁶ In total, there were 429 security incidents reported which resulted in a total of 148 casualties and 35 fatalities. They included 56 attacks on security-force vehicles (16 used IEDs, 20 involved mortars or rockets and 20 were shooting ambushes), and 239 small arms attacks against other targets.

At this stage it is unfortunately not possible to precisely calculate the ratio of fatal to non-fatal incidents of violence perpetrated by the PIRA because the security-force data currently available does not differentiate between the organisations responsible. We do know, however, that most incidents of PIRA violence were non-fatal. This should affect the way we interpret fatality data and assess the extent to which PIRA violence was lethal or

⁹¹² TNA, CJ4/2853.

⁹¹³ Ibid.

⁹¹⁴ Ibid., p.9.

⁹¹⁵ Ibid., p.12.

⁹¹⁶ P.E., Haskell, 14 November 1978, 'Vehicle Movement in South Armagh', Table 4, pp.1-7, TNA, CJ4/2853.

discriminate. The PIRA only succeeded in killing members of the security forces a fraction of the times they attempted to. By contrast, the PIRA succeeded to kill the civilians they targeted (as collaborators or in sectarian attacks) more often than they failed. This means that the civilian fatalities resulting from the sectarian and other targeted assassinations conducted by the PIRA are broadly representative of elements of armed struggle. Finally, the number of incidents when PIRA violence resulted in collateral damage is dwarfed by the number of shooting and bombing attacks that they perpetrated without killing civilians. However, the total extent of the harm that resulted – directly and indirectly – from the armed struggle exceeds these statistics.

PIRA violence played an indirect role in other civilian fatalities that resulted during the conflict. Five civilians died as a result of a heart attack in the 1970s after they witnessed a PIRA attack, were forced to evacuate a building targeted by a PIRA IED, or were informed that a loved one had been killed by the paramilitary group.⁹¹⁷ A case in point occurred in August 1972 – medical professionals confirmed that the fatal heart attack suffered by Patrick McGoldrick was caused by shock and resulted because the local pensioner heard the sound of a loud explosion when the PIRA bombed an electricity transformer close to their home in the village of Sion Mills (Co. Tyrone).

Further civilian fatalities that occurred in this period can be described as an indirect consequence of the armed struggle. For instance, there are cases when civilians were shot

⁹¹⁷ McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, references: 80, 174, 543, 606, 1187.

and killed by soldiers in the aftermath of a PIRA attack because, in the heat of the moment, they were mistaken for paramilitaries. The fatal shooting of civilian Michael Hudson by soldiers during the two-stage PIRA bomb attack at Narrow Water (Co. Armagh) on 27 August 1979 is one example of this. Another case in point occurred close to midnight on 12 June 1976 when the eight-person foot patrol of soldiers that had just been attacked by a PIRA landmine on the Meigh to Forkhill road shot and killed a local teacher, Liam Prince, because they wrongly assumed he had been involved in the attack when he drove past them.⁹¹⁸

Other civilians were killed as a result of a building collapse that occurred because of prior structural damage that had been caused by an earlier PIRA bomb attack. The fact that this could be classed as an indirect consequence of the PIRA's actions is indicated by the details of a compensation claim that was filed, but ultimately denied, in relation to a case in point. Mary Isobel Thompson was killed when a Salvation Army premises located on the Dublin Road in Central Belfast (which had been bombed by the PIRA previously) collapsed on 6 December 1971.⁹¹⁹ A verdict of death by misadventure was returned at the inquest into her death after the court heard evidence to suggest that members of the Salvation Army had been repeatedly warned not to enter the burnt-out building; and the associated compensation claim that was filed against the Ministry of Home Affairs was rejected on the basis that, in the coroner's view, that the death was not 'directly attributable' to the original crime (the bomb attack).⁹²⁰

⁹¹⁸ 'Coroner's Inquest relating to the death of Liam Prince', Public Records Office Northern Ireland (PRONI), ARM/6/1/1/30/17A; McKittrick, et. al., *Lost Lives*, reference: 1720; Morton, *Emergency Tour*, p.154.

⁹¹⁹ McKittrick et al., *Lost Lives*, reference: 207.

⁹²⁰ Ibid.

The PIRA's bombs and bullets inflicted injuries (including life-changing injuries) on thousands of soldiers, police officers and civilians, including children as well. PIRA violence caused others to suffer financial hardship. There are countless examples of references to the windows of nearby houses shattering when PIRA IEDs exploded in the general vicinity.⁹²¹ Or non-fatal incidents when civilian homes were damaged by off-target mortar rounds.⁹²² It is evident that the sound of large-scale IED, rocket, or mortar attacks caused significant upset too. Reports of security incidents often note that civilians were 'suffering from shock' or have been injured by falling debris. Those who experienced hijackings, hostage situations, or were forced to flee the scene of an imminent explosion are often reported to have suffered emotional distress. Finally, the longer-term psychological harm that was caused by the conflict is indicated in the rate of suicide or mental health admissions in Northern Ireland after 1969.⁹²³

⁹²¹ For example, a 200lb car bomb that was planted on James Street South in central Belfast on 11 May 1979 'shattered windows for hundreds of yards' and knocked the ATO who had been dealing with the device at time unconscious. Barzilay, volume 4, p.191.

⁹²² A PIRA rocket attack that targeted Beleek police station was said to have missed its target by 200 meters and hit the roof of a family home on 13 July 1973. No one was injured in the attack on this occasion, but an RUC spokesperson is reported to have said 'For the third time in recent days an IRA rocket attack has endangered the lives of innocent people.' See 'IRA rocket, off target, hits house', *Belfast Telegraph*, p.3.

⁹²³ Fay, Morrissey and Smyth found that the conflict was a contributing factor to the rising annual rates of unemployment, suicides, and mental health admissions in Northern Ireland between 1969 and 1994. See, for instance: 'Table 2: Deaths, GDP Per Head and Unemployment Rates' and 'Table 3: Deaths, Suicides and Mental Health Admission', in Marie Therese Fay, Mike Morrissey and Marie Smyth, *The Cost of the Troubles* (Belfast, 1997). Further discussion of the connection between mental health, suicide and the Troubles in Northern Ireland after 1998 is available in Knox, *The Killing*, pp.275-277.

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